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# Faulkner's Feeble Few: The Mentally Impaired Citizens of Yoknapatawpha

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FAULKNER'S FEEBLE FEW: THE MENTALLY IMPAIRED CITIZENS OF  
YOKNAPATAWPHA

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By

Matthew Brent Foxen

2014

FAULKNER'S FEEBLE FEW: THE MENTALLY IMPAIRED CITIZENS OF  
YOKNAPATAWPHA

by

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THESIS

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## INTRODUCTION

Anybody familiar with Faulkner's oeuvre has no doubt come across a number of examples of mentally impaired characters. The vast scope of his writing prevents one from the belief that his occasional attention to these characters is a primary focus of his work; however, Faulkner's *idiots* appear with such a frequency as warrants a closer study. From the most obvious and extreme example of Benjy Compson, Faulkner's non-verbal choice for the first narrator of *The Sound and the Fury*, to even the subtlest of similes—"Locust drifted up in sweet gusts, and the crickets and frogs were clear and monotonous as pipes blown drowsily by an idiot boy" (*Flags* 42-43)—readers are reminded of the presence of disabilities in Faulkner's fictional world and are invited to discern what implications these references may have on the works themselves.

Between two such extremes lies a bricolage of characters that challenge a person's understanding of normality in a Modern age. Many of these, Miss Emily Grierson for example, blur the lines between mental stability and instability, and provoke an inquiry into the boundaries between troubled emotions and mental impairment: "She told them [her visitors] that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body...we did not say she was crazy then" (*Collected* 123-24). The talk of the town changes, presumably, when the decades-dead corpse of her beau, Homer Barron, is discovered in her bed (*Collected* 130).

Similar questions arise in the liminal stages between childhood innocence and childlike mental impairment. *As I Lay Dying's* Vardaman invokes such questions as his failure to understand his mother's death leads him to the conclusion that her corpse and

that of a fish he caught and slaughtered are one and the same. “If she lets him [nail the box up] it is not her. I know. I was there. I saw it not be her. I saw. They think it is and Cash is going to nail it up. It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it’s all chopped up. I chopped it up” (66).

Additionally, Faulkner often plays with intelligence levels as they relate to socio-economics. The use of characters like Boon Hogganbeck satirizes the low quality of the intelligence of the poor, white citizens of the American South. Perhaps this criticism could be attributed simply to a lackadaisical approach toward education among poor people; however, available for inspection in such characters resides the possibility that more than a mere lack of education is at play. Boon is sent to school, but is incapable of advancing. “Even McCaslin Edmonds [had] given up or seen the light at last when Boon failed the third grade for the second time too” (*Reivers* 23). Boon’s inability to advance in school raises questions about his character, along with other low-income characters in Faulkner’s work. These characters are physically capable and independent; yet, their low intelligence levels place them in the realm of mental impairment. Boon’s earlier appearance, in “The Bear,” demonstrates this impairment by seemingly describing him as definitively unable to progress to an adult mental capacity. The narrator explains, “...he [Ike] was ten and Boon had been ten all his life” (*Go Down* 220). Ultimately, the reader must determine whether each of these poor characters suffers from a true intellectual disability, or whether low mental acuity occurs as a result of poor education.

For critics of Faulkner’s literature, these marginally impaired characters provide for a rich variety of analyses of his great works. A reader’s inability to determine just where, on a spectrum of mental capabilities, a character lies promotes an ambiguity in the

fiction, which reflects the unsettling nature of disabilities manifest in the world. The natural aversion to what presents itself as abnormal incites in the mainstream a sense of curiosity and fear.

Faulkner harnesses these feelings with his use of mentally impaired characters. Their inclusion in his novels and short stories contributes a mood to his fiction that is, at the same time, provincial and mysterious. The idyllic nature of Yoknapatawpha County has enslaved the intellects of an international body of readers for the better part of a century. People are drawn to the simplicity of the early 20th Century, rural American South, and the simple-minded characters, included by Faulkner, help to flavor those images. Faulkner's literature, however, is far from simple. By incorporating characters that are "not-quite-right" into this idyll, the author also disrupts any sense of peace that the reader may expect. An effort to understand these characters and Faulkner's reasons for including them compels questions with no easy answers for his readership.

Since the time of his writing, Faulkner's fiction has become included in a genre of fiction called Southern Gothic. The term, used by Ellen Glasgow (4), refers to a modern and Americanized revision of the classic Gothic novel. The genre relies on unsettling and monstrous elements, and Faulkner utilizes mental impairment, in part, to serve that need. If Faulkner's purpose as a writer, as has been suggested by an abundance of critics, was to point out the moral disintegration of the South, his use of characters with fully functional bodies, yet inadequate minds, must be understood as an effective means to that end.

Faulkner's horror replaces traditional Gothic monsters, figures with strength of body, though questionable moral strength, with the realistic presence of the mentally



disabled. These characters are able-bodied, but their inability to function mentally on a socially-acceptable level, though often comical, invites distrust and fear from the “normal” members of Yoknapatawpha County and from Faulkner’s readership. The ambiguity of these characters’ capabilities instills in them an implicit quality that incites fear and misunderstanding.

While disability alone may be enough to perpetuate that fear, Faulkner augments the anxiety surrounding many of these characters by additionally imbuing them with heightened or sometimes supernatural attributes. He exploits the inability to understand mental impairments fully by granting such characters levels of perception that are incongruous to a reader’s sense of the normal. Benjy Compson, for example, senses death in a way that the rest of his household cannot understand (*Sound* 34). These heightened senses further isolate these characters from mainstream society and prevent valid empathetic connections between them and the readers; thereby, an unsettling disconnect is maintained throughout these narratives, which enforces the dystopic deviation from the idyll and enhances the theme of moral disintegration.

Taking these broad ideas regarding Faulkner’s utilization of characters with mental disabilities into account, one can identify three general objectives. First, these characters function on a literal level. Regardless of what interpretive reasons Faulkner may have had in including mentally impaired characters, they each exist within their separate narratives and within the Faulknerian intertextuality of Yoknapatawpha County to serve as fundamental components of the literary whole. Second, these characters are used aesthetically. The misunderstanding and inherent mistrust of disabilities establishes a mood of tension and mystery, which plays contrapuntally to the simple, provincial mood

also purveyed. Third, these characters work figuratively as uncanny representatives of imperfection. What Faulkner's mentally impaired characters lack resonates within their respective narratives, as well as within the South, within America, and within the world as a whole, to perpetuate the author's overall warning against holding on too tightly to institutions, which can so easily falter.

Using these objectives as a foundation, this study looks closely at three of Faulkner's better-known mentally impaired characters: *The Sound and the Fury's* Benjamin Compson, *Sanctuary's* Tommy, and *As I Lay Dying's* Darl Bundren. All three characters are widely dissimilar in who they are, how they function, and what they represent; yet, common threads tie the three together. In closely analyzing these characters, this investigation determines that Faulkner uses mentally impaired characters to unsettle his readers and to force them into introspective investigations of their own standards of normality. By so doing, the author challenges his readers' preconceptions of the "normal" world as such; he reminds all of the ludicrousness of steadfastness in an ever-altering world.

By the same token, William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* famously reduces life to "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (841). The passage, in addition to aligning thematically with Faulkner's purpose, contains the title of his novel, which forms the subject of the first chapter of this study. *The Sound and the Fury* tells of the fall of the Southern aristocratic Compson family through moral decline. One child of that family, Benjy, though he is non-verbal, provides the first narration of the novel. Chapter One investigates the way Benjy's household and community view and interact with him. In addition, the chapter explores the creative relationship that Faulkner

establishes between reader and narrator in this powerful novel.

The second chapter of this study analyzes Faulkner's sensational thriller, *Sanctuary*. It takes a close look at the lesser-acknowledged victim of the novel—the horrors that Temple Drake suffers and the resulting trauma often overshadow the fact that the murder of Tommy is the subject of the trial that forms the foundation, which compels the plot. *Sanctuary* tells the story of a young woman who finds herself in the company of a gang of bootleggers for a day. During her stay she is raped by one of the members of the gang who, in order to commit that crime, also kills a fellow member, Tommy. Lee Goodwin, the gang's leader, is charged with the murder, while attempts are made to find Temple and her true attacker and kidnapper, Popeye. Tommy's mental impairment being less overt than Benjy's, Chapter Two probes his interactions with the other characters in the novel to assess the level of his disability and the implications he has for the overall piece.

Arguably, the most complex of Faulkner's characters is Darl Bundren. The subject of Chapter Three of this composition exhibits a sharper mental acuity than the other members of his family or his community; however, he is ultimately confined to an insane asylum. *As I Lay Dying* relates the trials of a poor Southern family that journeys across the county to fulfill a mother's last request to be buried in the homeland of her youth. Darl's mental instability is questionable at best, and Chapter Three looks closely at the attitudes and comments of his neighbors and his siblings, along with his own words and actions. Whether he is justly incarcerated as a mentally unstable human or is unjustly incarcerated by a mentally inferior community, the novel's message, that insanity is subject to the masses' interpretation of normality, provides an excellent case-study to this investigation.

As a fictional community, Yoknapatawpha County has awed generations of people. Among its inhabitants are a colorful selection of mentally impaired individuals. The frequency with which Faulkner writes about these people, along with his propensity toward symbolic elements, encourages a close inspection of such characters. They exist in his narratives as beings who fall short of worldly standards of normality. As such they tend to unsettle the characters around them along with the readers of Faulkner's masterful fiction.

## 1: FAULKNER'S BENJY AS A SYMBOL FOR THE DETERIORATION OF THE OLD SOUTH

In *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader is brought uncomfortably close to mental disability, the narrator of one fourth of the novel having gained the reputation of voiceless “idiot.” In this context, the disability cannot be interpreted solely as an uncanny element; rather, Benjamin serves a direct purpose to the thematic importance of the novel. Faulkner gives a voice to the voiceless. By casting Benjy as an “other” both from the perspective of his family as well as within the reader-narrator relationship, William Faulkner uses this mentally disabled character to set up a mirror to his readership, challenging their resistance to change. Benjy captures, in an almost ridiculous way, the attitudes of recalcitrance common to all of humankind, making us rethink those orientations.

By establishing Benjy as the narrator of the first section of this novel, Faulkner creates something of a paradox for the audience in their understanding of that man. The reader is introduced to the words and logic of a human being who has no communicative voice. “Many have noted that Benjy is ‘pre-lingual,’ that he ‘could never really narrate his section’ because he has no language. But he is in fact *nonlingual*: the language of the Benjy section is Faulkner’s language” (Polk 144). Faulkner’s audience must discern, through Benjamin’s narrative presentation of himself, that the man cannot speak intelligible words and communicates solely through moans, wailings, and abstruse gestures; furthermore, Benjy’s inability to communicate isolates him as an “other” in his own family.

Caroline Compson, ever more concerned with her own ailments than with the needs

or concerns of her family, relies on Benjy's proximity to her inasmuch as his presence displays for the outsider yet another grand cross that the woman must bear. She does little, of course, to bear that cross herself, and instead relegates the responsibilities of care-taking onto her other children and onto the household servants. Her attitude towards Benjy seems to regress the older they both get. As a child of about seven, Benjy seems to receive loving concern from Caroline and relates, "Mother took my face in her hands and then she held me against her. 'My poor baby.' She said. She let me go. 'You and Versh take good care of him, honey'" (8). While she does demonstrate a genuine care for him in his early years, by the time her mentally disabled son grows to adulthood Caroline allows the man to be as visible as possible exterior of the Compson household walls. She sends him out walking with Luster, allows him to attend church with Dilsey, and regularly has him driven through town. Conversely, inside the house, she commands that Benjy remain as invisible as possible: "What is it now. Cant I even be sick in peace. Do I have to get up out of bed to come down to him, with two grown negroes to take care of him" (59). Caroline needs Benjy and his disability because she needs the sympathy that comes with him. The story offers little to support that, by the time Benjy has matured, his mother treats him with any great level of love or support.

Perhaps the only member of the Compson family who does demonstrate love, care, and respect for Benjy is his sister, Caddy. In the opening situation of the novel the reader witnesses the effect that, years after she is gone, the sound of Caddy's name, called out by golfers hailing their caddies, has on the mentally disabled man. Any form of loss affects him. Even the loss of flowers, which Luster hides from his sight, moves Benjy to sadness: "I tried to pick up the flowers. Luster picked them up, and they went away. I

began to cry” (55). We can begin to understand the full extent of Benjy’s trauma, then, when he loses the only genuine family member he has—assuming that a genuine family member is one who is unconditional in the love he or she bestows on the other members of his or her family. First, when Caddy matures enough to need her own bedroom, and later when she leaves the household for good, Benjy must adapt to changes beyond his capacity for understanding. “To Benjy, Caddy’s growing interest in her body and in males outside the family signifies her eventual death to him” (Matthews 42). He feels personally rejected by his sister during these moments, which are no better for him than the most insensitive abuse he receives from the younger of his older brothers.

While most of his family members tolerate Benjy’s presence in the home, Jason Compson IV seems to hold Benjy personally responsible for the disappointments of his own life. He even suggests that rather than let his brother be a burden on the family, they should “Rent him out to a sideshow; there must be folks somewhere that would pay a dime to see him” (196). Benjy is not a unique victim in this regard; Jason maintains a level of contempt for every member of his family. Unlike his oldest brother, sister, and father who are all absent by the present narrative of April 1928, his mother who is ignorant of Jason’s true feelings for her, and his niece who can at the very least speak up for herself against Jason’s brutality, Benjy has no option but to accept the tyranny of his older brother. That tyranny, as far as Benjy is concerned, is seen most vividly in the way that Benjy is silenced throughout the novel: “‘Stop it Mother.’ Jason said. ‘Do you want to get that damn looney to bawling in the middle of the square’” (12). Rather than pursue what concerns may be behind Benjy’s outbursts, Jason demands that his brother be kept silent.

The task of maintaining Benjy's silence is relegated to the family's black working staff, most particularly in the present action of the novel to the boy, Luster. Luster's responsibility in the household is to occupy Benjy's time, to walk him around the community, and to prevent his being seen or heard by his family. While the task was handed down to Luster from the older members of his own family, there is a streak of rebellion in the way that young Luster carries out his duties. Luster likes to exhibit his own control over Benjy which he does by manipulating the man's sensitivities. "Beller." Luster said. 'Beller. You want something to beller about. All right, then. Caddy.' He whispered. 'Caddy. Beller now. Caddy'" (55). Faulkner presents an interesting dichotomy in the relationship between Luster and his charge—one that was common to any family in the South leading up to and following the Civil War. Namely, when black caregivers are charged with the responsibility of raising white children, who in the relationship is given the greater authority? Faulkner explodes that dichotomy in the case of Luster and Benjy because there the caregiver is a child, himself in need of discipline, and the charge is a white, adult male—one who, in any situation but his own, would be guaranteed supremacy by those three factors alone.

Regardless of how Luster handles the task to which he is assigned, the truth of Benjy's plight is that his family forces him into silence. In the same way that they order a knife to remove from Benjy his drive and capacity to reproduce, they cut from him the natural right to communicate his concerns. Benjy maintains an odd position in the novel as a member of a Southern aristocratic family, but one who is "othered" and ignored by his relations. In addition to the silencing of his voice, the family constantly excludes him from any major events. Particularly disturbing to him are the funeral of his father (32–35)



and the marriage of his sister (40). Because of his disability, Benjy receives the status and treatment of one who is beneath even the servants of the household. In most circumstances a reader wouldn't think twice about a character in Benjy's situation—the man is severely retarded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, so of course he would be consigned to the periphery.

The paradox that Faulkner ignites with Benjy, though, is that he proposes that the *idiot* does have a voice and he allows that voice to be heard. Though forced by his family into a role of silence—mostly because they assume the man has nothing worth saying and they refuse to expend the time and effort needed to discover what he may be trying to convey—Benjy proves at the novel's genesis that he is a being capable of thinking and communicating; that he is imbued with the capacities to reason and to love.

The task that Faulkner set for himself on sitting down to write *The Sound and the Fury* was to determine and to convey, through the novel's first narrative at least, what goes on in the mind of the *simple-minded*. An interview with Maud Falkner sheds light on a possible inspiration for Benjy.

Well, there was an idiot child in one of the old families in Oxford, when the boys were just little. He used to run up and down the fence in front of his house, trying to talk to passersby. The boys used to see him and were curious about him when they were little. (Dahl 1027)

Though Faulkner has not escaped criticism<sup>1</sup>, he does this unapologetically and without warning to his audience members, who, on their first reading of the novel, must discover at some point who is speaking to them, must analyze what that means for their perception of the first seventy-five pages and of the piece at large, and must judge, uncomfortably, to

what degree the narration may be trusted. “It is a monstrous violation of the fictional tradition that identifies a ‘narrator,’ especially a first person narrator, with a point of view and demands that narrators be self-conscious enough to describe what is happening to others and to themselves” (Polk 140). Benjy’s narration informs the readers that, though he is mentally disabled and has been from birth, he is a being capable of reason, of photographic memory, and of communication.

Benjy’s narrative, like the majority of the novel, is recorded following the stream-of-consciousness style. A few factors, though, set Benjy’s section apart from the narratives of Quentin and Jason. The most obvious of these factors is that Benjy is extremely objective in his storytelling. The novel begins, for example, with the following passage:

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting.

They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass. (3)

Benjy’s description of Luster’s and his walking along the outskirts of a golf course and watching the golfers play a hole is devoid of any subjective signifiers—specifics which Faulkner omits in order to suggest his narrator’s capacity to observe and limitations in conveying. In the passage the word *golf* is never used. Instead, the men *hit*. Additionally, Benjy has no specific names for the flora, which he conveys. The fence is

either over-grown with, or is designed to look like, *curling flowers* and Luster searches near a *flower tree*. The objective style of narration is extremely important in an understanding of Benjy because, in the omissions of specific vocabulary, Faulkner invites his readers to understand that, though he cannot form words audibly, their narrator does have a working vocabulary.

He has no language, since language can exist only at the juncture of time and space: signifiers and signifieds find each other and create meaning only at pinpointed cruxes where word sound and referent become one by mutual agreement between sender and receiver. (Polk 141–42)

This key truth about Benjy is denied by his family members, who seem only interested in preventing Benjy from making any sounds.

In addition to the limits of his vocabulary, the objectivity of Benjy's narrative shows itself in the limits of inadequate perception. Benjy only relates those images that he receives. No human being is capable of receiving every image in any given circumstance; however, where most would piece together data into one coherent experience, Benjy relates only the images as they come/came to him, as in this description: "They hunted in the branch. Then they all stood up quick and stopped, then they splashed and fought in the branch. Luster got it and they squatted in the water, looking up the hill through the bushes" (16). In passages like these, the reader must work to perceive what Benjy is unable to. In this case Benjy did not see the golf ball enter the river nor hear its splash, which the other boys apparently heard, so such details are left out of his description and the readers must infer for themselves what has actually occurred. Faulkner uses this rather insignificant moment to prepare his readers for the

more significant inferences—like Versh’s possibly catching Quentin masturbating in the barn (46, 73)—that they will need to make in the remainder of the narrative.

It must be noted here that while Benjy seems incapable of filling in gaps, he is extremely capable at piecing events together. Benjy has an excellent memory and an analysis of when and how his narrative shifts between memories, like his memories of various funerals and deaths (27–35), supports a level of reasoning in Benjy’s character, which his family may deny of him.

Another noteworthy facet of Benjy’s narrative is, as Noel Polk has stated (145), that Faulkner makes his narrator a synesthete. In other words, Benjy often receives sense impressions through the “wrong” sensory receptors<sup>2</sup>. “I couldn’t feel the gate at all,” he relates, “but I could smell the bright cold” (6). In this statement, Benjy admits to receiving visual and tactile sense impressions through his olfactory receptor. While most serious studies of the phenomenon have been conducted within the last twenty years, Francis Galton first used the term in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Ramachandran and Hubbard 49). One can only speculate as to the reasons that Faulkner would have given Benjy synesthetic qualities. The phenomenon for him is not limited to the sense of smell: “Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell. And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing” (75). I would argue that through synesthesia, Faulkner emphasizes the importance of sensory reception to his readers’ understanding of Benjy, who does tend to favor the sense of smell. Benjy connects certain odors with experiences and to those experiences he attaches meanings that can be important to an analysis of the novel.

This point brings me to a final observation of Benjy’s narrative. Benjy is severely

affected by olfactory memory triggers. Following a study on odor memory, E. P. Köster has come to the following conclusion: “Odors are not ‘things’, they are linked to personal situations and the same odor may be pleasant in one situation and unpleasant in another. They may lose [*sic*] their original meaning when identified” (i237). Köster’s study suggests that odor memory is less a connection between a named object and its olfactory trigger, and it is more about the overall composition of significant events or settings. Benjy exhibits strong odor memory to the extent that he attaches prominent odors in significant events to the participants in those events. The sound of rain on the roof during a fond memory of his father and oldest brother informs the reader that it is raining during that event, which explains why Benjy associates both of those men with the smell of rain (64, 66). This is most significant for the reader in Benjy’s mantra that Caddy smelled like trees. The odor memory suggests that Benjy’s fondest or most significant memory of Caddy involved a tree, most probably the tree that Caddy climbed on the night of Damuddy’s death, when Benjamin was a toddler (39). It suggests that seeing his sister climb that tree may have affected Benjy in a similar manner to the sexual arousal with which it affected Quentin. “Like his brother Quentin, Benjy’s life wears at him and he withdraws. Unlike Quentin, he withdraws into his mind, to better versions of his life than his bleak present” (Roggenbuck 592). This in turn, informs our understanding of the effect that Caddy’s wedding may have had on Benjy, who remarks, “I couldn’t smell trees anymore and I began to cry” (40).

Once the reader comes to the point of realization that the first narrative of this novel is “a tale told by an idiot,” he or she must come to grips with the implications that this particular narrator may bring. Does Benjy’s disability make him an unreliable

witness to the events? I would say not. In fact, I would argue that in many ways Faulkner's representation of a disabled mind allows him to create a clearer picture. Since Benjy is vividly and unwaveringly objective in his narration, the readers do not have to judge his words in the way that they will have to judge Quentin's, Jason's, and even the fourth, and nameless, narrator's. Faulkner provides Benjy as a believable deponent to a family history.

Although the objective nature of Benjy's narrative makes his portion of the story more reliable, Faulkner, in utilizing such a non-traditional narrator, forces each of his readers to judge his or her own comfort-level in accepting this account. Every reader, conditioned by his or her past experiences with narrative perspective, and biased by an undeniable quantity of egocentricity, presumes an initial narrative intellect, an assumption of normality to or from which may be added or subtracted. Through the course of our readings, we check those presumptions against the details we are given and the inferences we can make. As a reader becomes more familiar with the narrator of any novel or story, he or she begins to scrutinize and to make judgments on that narrator's reliability or lack thereof. That stated, it is my assumption—one I believe to be justified—that no reader, who has not been previously exposed to the particulars of the text, begins *The Sound and the Fury* with a mind actively open to the possibility that its narrator is mentally disabled. If my assumption is correct, then there comes a moment, for each reader, in which the discovery of Benjy's handicap occurs. For some it may be earlier; for some later. For each, though, I maintain that the pattern of recognition is the same. Readers begin with the presumption that the narrator is *normal*, but their reading lends them clues that the narrator is *not normal*. Further attention to the details of the

story reveals to the readers that Benjy is cognitively impaired. Finally, the readers judge for themselves how Benjy's disability affects their reading. All of this suggests that Benjy is not "othered" by his family alone, but that each reader also "others" him in his or her own assessment of the novel. At the aforementioned moment of discovery, readers may begin to mistrust Benjy, they may adopt a new level of sympathy for the man, they may curse Faulkner for having tried to "put one over" on them, they may marvel at the author's ingenuity, they may have any other reaction, or they may have a combination of reactions. The use of a mentally disabled narrator is jarring to an audience because, as Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber's study on subversive voices suggests, we know ourselves, through the "others" around us. "The effort to preserve subject status in the midst of conflicting forces is ongoing precisely because identity stems from the Other or from a site outside of the self" (50). The specifics of how the discovery affects the reader are moot in comparison to the reality that each reader is affected. Those effects demonstrate that from the moment of discovery, Benjy, in the eyes of his audience, is an "other".

The readers, therefore, become active participants in the novel by consigning Benjy, as his family does, to the novel's periphery. We may sympathize with the poor man, particularly when we discover such moments of inhumanity as the real reason behind the changing of his name—"Your mamma too proud for you" (69)—or the vile truth of his castration—"Looking for them [testicles] aint going to do no good. They're gone" (73); however, we rely on those moments to clarify for ourselves the situations around which Benjy is included. Benjy therefore becomes essentially a symbol in the novel more than he participates as a character in it, and while any character may also act as a symbolic element in his or her respective plot, Benjy seems restricted from being

much more than symbolic.

In their attempts to understand his role within the family and within the plot, many critics regard Benjy, not as an actor in the plot, but as an object himself. Some of these critics, like James M. Mellard, attach religious significance to the man on account of his age and the fact that he was born around Easter. He writes, “Benjy and Dilsey participate in an iconographic system of anagogic symbolism within the novel. In the novel’s first section, Faulkner makes clear that the idiot represents ‘innocence’ in the world of *The Sound and the Fury*” (227–28). For these critics and for the general audience of Faulkner’s novel, Benjy remains simultaneously a vital piece of the whole, yet a non-participant prop therein. We accept his narrative as true and overtly objective because we submit, based on little more than the mere fact of presentation, to Faulkner’s assumption that a mentally disabled person would see the world in such an objective manner. Regardless of the fact that there is no proof of verisimilitude to this presentation, Faulkner’s readers lend credence to it, and perpetuate what remains a careful guess at best. Yet, if Benjy, banished to the liminal spaces of the novel, is meant to be perceived as a symbol, the reader must further determine what he is to represent and how effective that representation is.

Much of Faulkner’s fiction, particularly the novels and stories of Yoknapatawpha County, treat the deterioration of the Southern gentry following the Civil War. *The Sound and the Fury* is no exception to that fact. In this novel, the dysfunctional Compson family strives to endure, while the past slips slowly through their fingers. Faulkner asserts in his novel that the days of the respectable Southern gentleman are gone. His patriarch dies of alcoholism, leaving behind a self-righteous and hypochondriac wife. His primogenital



son, rotten from a life-long sexual obsession with his sister, takes his own life. That sister—the belle of the family—leads a promiscuous life, which results in a child-out-of-wedlock and her banishment from the family, and, at fifteen, the child she has begins to make the same life choices that ruined her mother. The third child of the ignoble patriarch, both lazy and self-serving, has no sense of family honor nor seeming desire to propagate the Compson name. And the last-born remains a mentally handicapped man with no capacity for independent living and no physical way of increasing the family.

As mentioned earlier, Benjy serves little active function in the novel as a character, though he is chosen by Faulkner to be the first narrative voice of the novel's four. Benjy's account is disjointed, and transitions between times and events are abrupt and often unexplained. What can be unraveled from the first chapter of the novel is that Benjy was born Maury Compson, but as a young boy of five, his name was changed to Benjamin, following the discovery that he was born with a severe mental disability. He and his siblings were all kept in the care of the family's black servants, and his sister Caddy was the only member of his family that remained close to him after the discovery of his disability. As a child, he would wait at the front fence for his sister to come home from school. Benjy would grow jealous of the time Caddy spent with boys as she matured. His keen sense of smell was offended by Caddy's use of perfume and could detect a change on the night she most likely lost her virginity (68–69). Pregnant out of marriage, Caddy is married off to Herbert Head. T.P., teenaged Benjy's caretaker at the time of the wedding, steals and shares alcohol with Benjy. They both get drunk and Benjy's oldest brother, Quentin, beats T.P. for his negligence. The disruption allows Benjy to confront Caddy who shortly after leaves the Compson household for good. In

the time following Caddy's departure, Benjy suffers two more great losses. One is the death by suicide of Quentin, and the other is his own castration. Benjy sees some girls walking from school and wishes to "talk" to them. The gate being unlatched, he grabs one of the girls and is beaten by another man. The event leads the Compsons toward the decision to castrate Benjy. Caddy, having been divorced from her husband, sends her illegitimate child to be raised by the Compsons. The next tragedy that befalls the family is the death of Benjy's father, Jason Compson III, due to alcoholism. Those moments of the chapter that are not part of the narrator's memories take place on his 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday. The estate has changed significantly over the years as fields were sold off for a local golf course to pay for Quentin's first and only year at Harvard. Benjy's current caregiver is a boy named Luster. Benjy follows Luster around as he searches for a lost quarter, which he needs in order to pay his entrance into a music show that evening. In their search, the two happen upon Benjy's niece, Miss Quentin, who is kissing a man in a red tie. Later that night, Quentin and Jason fight at the supper table, and Quentin threatens to run away. As Benjy prepares for bed, he and Luster watch Quentin escape from her bedroom.

As a character with severe mental disability, Benjy contributes very little action to the narrative. He is present at the margin of most events and remains (often as a nuisance) in the thoughts and actions of the novel's key players, but he himself does little to further the plot. His presence in the novel is used more as a symbol, specifically as a representation of the deteriorating south.

For one thing, the characters in the novel seem awkward in their treatment and management of Benjy. The principal characters each develop their own ways of dealing with the boy/man. Attention must also be given, though, to the treatment Benjy receives

from some of the minor characters. “Compson” is a big name in Faulkner’s Jefferson, Mississippi. Historically, the family had maintained a position of honor in the community; however, the reactions that the community has toward the offspring of that mighty family are quite telling in regards to the changing status of the aristocratic family. The community’s misunderstanding or mistreating of Benjy is a substitution for the fallen respect for the Compson family name.

One of these, who mistreats Benjy is not an outsider at all; he is family. In fact, he is Benjy’s namesake: Uncle Maury Bascomb. Maury relies on Benjy’s handicap to keep his secret affair with Mrs. Patterson safe. Having made the trip to the Pattersons’ to deliver love letters with Caddy, Maury begins, in Caddy’s absence, to send Benjy alone. On one such occasion, Mr. Patterson intercepts a letter, exposing the affair to both families and to the entire community. “*You idiot, Mrs. Patterson said, I told him never to send you alone again. Give it to me. Quick. Mr Patterson came fast, with a hoe*” (13). Maury has no qualms about exploiting the Compson family—he’s been relying on Jason’s fortune for years—and his exploitation does not stop, when it comes to Benjy. In him, Maury finds a grunt to do his dirty work and to act in a way that is unbecoming of the Compson family name. Additionally telling is the way that the neighbors view the boy. Mr. Patterson seems to care for—possibly pity—Benjy. He sent the boy candy at an earlier date (13). On the other hand, Mrs. Patterson fears the boy. According to the quotation above, this is not the first time that Benjy has delivered a letter alone; however, she is untrusting of the boy. Her use of the word *idiot* suggests that her mistrust is the result of his disability. Interestingly, the way the memory reads in Benjy’s retelling of the event, Mrs. Patterson’s reaction to the boy is *the* factor that indicts her, and not Benjy’s

coming alone at all.

Another instance of community misunderstanding and mistreatment occurs in Benjy's teenage years. Missing Caddy, who has left the house for good, Benjy watches the girls walking past his house on their way home from school. On one of these days, Benjy notices that the gate is unlatched. He records the girls' conversation: "'There he is.' / They stopped. / 'He can't get out. He won't hurt anybody anyway. Come on.' / 'I'm scared to. I'm scared. I'm going to cross the street.' / 'He can't get out.'" (52-53).

Though at least one of the girls takes this walk daily, there is a sense of trepidation in the group. Even though Benjy has ever been harmless toward them, the girls fear him as an outsider, whom they don't understand. And on this day they do have reason to fear.

They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. (53)

We can't be sure what exactly it was that Benjy was trying to say to the girl. Neither can we ascertain what exactly happened to him, although the description implies that he had been hit in the face or on the head by someone who had come to the girls' aid. That mysterious intervener seems to make the assumption that Benjy is a threat to the girls, though he is merely trying to communicate with them. Again, the community fears and becomes overly defensive of Benjy because he is a non-normal member in their midst. Before moving on, there remains one unsettling factor about this exchange, which would be noteworthy to mention in this study. Benjy demonstrates a level of reasoning, timing, and cunning in this moment that is quite atypical of his character on the whole. "It was

open when I touched it, and I held to it in the twilight. I wasn't crying, and I tried to stop, watching the girls coming along in the twilight. I wasn't crying" (52). Benjy notices that the gate is unlatched well before the girls are in range of him. He notices that and purposefully keeps silent and holds his movements. In other words, he bides his time, waiting for them to come close enough for him to grab. It is unclear what the full implications of that were for Benjy's actions, but the possibility exists that his grabbing the girl could have been some kind of attack, justifying the 'mystery man's' defense against that attack.

The final two outsider-perspectives of Benjy will be analyzed together by way of contrast. These are the male suitors of Caddy and Miss Quentin. As an adolescent, Benjy discovers Caddy kissing Charlie (47–48). Caddy is immediately concerned for Benjy and sends Charlie, eager to resume their activities, back. Charlie at one point even intimates that because of Benjy's disability they could continue their love-making in his presence. The suggestion dehumanizes Benjy, and it changes Caddy's mind about her relationship with Charlie. She leaves him and washes the bad taste from her mouth. This scene repeats itself in the present, offering Quentin as a substitute for Caddy, the red tie man for Charlie. The similarities go no further than that. In this instance, Quentin orders Luster and Benjy to leave, so that she can continue the intimate moment with her lover; however, the musician seems interested in the disabled man and tests his limits by playing a cruel joke on him—trying to get him to swallow a lit match (49). Both of these men look down on Benjy. Unlike others in the community, they do not seem to fear him, but both dehumanize him and seek their enjoyment as his expense.

As one of the remaining members of the aristocratic Compson family, Benjy would, in earlier days, be accorded respect by mere fact of his blood. He does not see that in his community, though. People both in and out of his family use Benjy to meet their own desires and fear him as some kind of monstrous outsider. The community's attitude toward Benjy mirrors the changing culture and the decline of the Southern gentry.

For the black men in the service of the Compsons, taking care of Benjy seems to be a rite of passage. From the time of his birth to the novel's present time, there are three boys who serve, at one period or another, as Benjy's caretaker. Given the convoluted nature of Benjy's narrative, his caregivers are often a good way for the reader to track the chronology of events in the first chapter, but in addition to that, they offer a creative way to track the deterioration of the Old South. The quality of care that these boys give varies from person to person, and, while those variations may have something to do with the ever-increasing age of their charge, the variances seem also to reflect changing attitudes toward the Southern aristocracy.

At the time he is a toddler, Benjy, along with his siblings, falls under the responsibility of Dilsey's son, Versh. In the novel, Benjy remembers Versh in a couple of instances. One memory he has is of Versh helping him to get bundled up in December to go out and meet Caddy returning from school. In the presence of the Compson adults, Versh seems to be very attentive to Benjy's needs. "*Hold still now* Versh said. He put my overshoes on...*Now stomp*" (8). Versh is also with the Compson children on the day of Damuddy's death. As the oldest member of the group, the children look to Versh for guidance and positive reinforcement: "'I'm older than that.' Quentin said, 'I go to school. Don't I, Versh'" (17). However, "othered" by the color of his skin, Versh is

simultaneously held under the power of the white children. “Caddy came to Versh and me and turned her back. / ‘Unbutton it, Versh.’ she said. / ‘Don’t you do it, Versh.’ Quentin said. / ‘Taint non of my dress.’ Versh said. / ‘You unbutton it, Versh.’ Caddy said. ‘Or I’ll tell Dilsey what you did yesterday.’ So Versh unbuttoned it” (18). In fact, the only real power that Versh has over the children, is his own power to tell on them. “He said he was going to tell on Caddy and Quentin, and then Quentin and Caddy began to splash water at Versh” (18).

When Versh gets old enough to take on heavier chores, the responsibility of occupying Benjy’s time gets passed on to his younger brother, T. P. Benjy and T. P. are not so different in age, and T. P. is not, as his older brother was, expected to watch all of the children. Since Benjy does not have the capacity to “tell” like the other children did, the dynamic between the caregiver and his charge changes a bit. T. P. treats Benjy more like an equal. He is curious of Benjy’s difference and is upfront in the way he talks to Benjy. T.P.’s rapport is very casual with Benjy as he inquires about the latter’s heightened sensitivities: “[The dog] smell it.’ T. P. said. ‘Is that the way you found it out... / ‘I forgot your coat.’ T. P. said. “You ought to had it. But I aint going back... / ‘Hush now.’ T. P. said... ‘I can’t take you home, bellering like you is... You was bad enough before you got that bull-frog voice” (34–35). T. P. understands the importance of his role as Benjy’s caregiver, but he doesn’t let that prevent him from doing what he wants to do. On the night of Caddy’s wedding, T. P.’s responsibility is to keep Benjy away from the ceremony, but he uses the event as an opportunity to steal liquor from Jason’s cellar and proceeds to get himself and Benjy drunk. Quentin later thrashes him for this mishap.

By the time Benjy is 33, he is entrusted to the care of Versh and T. P.'s nephew, Luster. Luster was born and raised in the presence of Benjy; he only ever knew the man as a dependent adult. Luster uses the opportunity of Benjy's silence to enact cruelty upon him. He is well aware of what situations will set Benjy off and he takes delight in manipulating such circumstances. Such is the case in the kitchen when Luster uses a wire to control the door of the stove (57–59). Benjy is at peace, entranced by the firelight, but Luster manipulates his emotions for no reason by closing and opening the door. Luster is also markedly different in the way that he talks to Benjy. “‘Shut up that moaning.’ Luster said... ‘If you don’t hush up, mammy aint going to have no birthday for you. If you don’t hush you know what I going to do. I going to eat that cake all up. Eat them candles, too. Eat all them thirty three candles’” (4). In Luster’s opinion, he is superior to Benjy. The childlike man is a nuisance to him, a burden that the boy has no option but to carry. Luster has little respect for Benjy nor for any of the Compsons, and little wonder, as by the time he was old enough to reason, the family had morally deteriorated.

From the time that Versh is responsible for the young Compsons, Benjy’s family sinks to embarrassing lows. His sister’s promiscuity, the suicide that prompts in her older brother, and the resentment it brings about in her younger brothers, all tarnish the once respectable name of Compson. Throughout that time, Dilsey’s family remains as a constant in the background. The readers can see a progression in the treatment of Benjy from Versh, to T. P., to Luster, that reflects the changing attitudes that Dilsey’s family and society in general have for the once great family.

Without a doubt, reading the changing attitudes of Benjy’s black caretakers would have been quite troubling for Faulkner’s contemporary audience, particularly those who,



like both Faulkner and the Compsons, were remnants of the Southern aristocracy. The behavior of these later servants, particularly Luster, are reminders of the disruption to the order on which the pre-Civil War South had prided itself. That element of a South that cannot come to grips with the chaos of a new order is directly presented through Benjy.

Reading the first chapter of the novel is like viewing photographs, which for the narrator are always fresh, real, and current, while the audience recognizes them as but captured images of a removed past. “The numinous word in Benjy’s monologue projects not merely the ‘sculptured stasis’ of a caught moment, but the entire world of stasis, of people frozen in the unchanging posture, endlessly repeated, which has become for Benjy the particular norm of their identity” (Kartiganer 80–81). Whether because he does not understand change or because he strictly does not like it, Benjy seems to have emotional breakdowns whenever the order of his life is disrupted. These could be moments as simple (to the average reader) as the oven door being closed to conceal the mesmerizing flames inside. “The long wire came across my shoulder, and the fire went away. I began to cry” (58). These moments can also be as complex as the tragedy of human loss, which tries any human’s capacity for change, yet Benjy seems to be more sensitive to disruptions like these as they occur at the Compson house. Roskus makes such an observation: ““He know lot more than folks thinks...He knowed they time was coming, like that pointer done. He could tell you when hisn, if he could talk. Or yours. Or mine”” (31–32). And there are also those moments that could be understood for their simplicity, yet carry more significant meaning. Such a moment occurs with Benjy’s reactions to Caddy’s perfume, as has already been stated. Fred Chappell argues that Benjy’s routine and the way that it influences the entire Compson household lend a comic structure to the

novel. “If comic characters must follow settled routines, never deviating, then this household is strictly comic, for its routine revolves about the well-being of Benjy, and Benjy cannot tolerate any change whatsoever in the strict order of his world” (217).

During and following the Restoration, the South was in a state of chaotic upheaval. The old way of living was rapidly shut down. Along with it died a sense of pride that had roots as old as the most aged cotton plantation. The moral decline of the Compson family, as Faulkner presents it in *The Sound and the Fury*, characterizes that sense of change and the difficulties incurred by those totally rooted in the construct of the Southern noble class. This theme is presented brilliantly to the audience in Quentin’s memory of a conversation with his father. Faced with his sister’s pregnancy and what that would mean for her and the whole family, Quentin tells his father that she became pregnant with him. In the ensuing conversation, father Jason warns,

you are still blind to what is in yourself to that part of general truth the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every mans brow even benjys you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead. (177)

Jason seems to have been able to come to grips with the fact that there is no stopping the changes that have been happening around him. He buries himself in alcohol and lets what may, befall. Of particular importance to this analysis, though, is Jason’s reference to Benjy. Though in the eyes of his family Benjy is a simpleton, Jason makes a connection to his youngest son’s inability to accept change. He uses that as teaching moment for his oldest son, just as Faulkner uses Benjy as a teaching moment for his readership in the

South. The author makes that connection here, through the mouth of Jason III, but drives it home in the final moments of the novel.

His reference to Benjy with Quentin, sheds some understanding to the odd ending of the novel. When readers understand Benjy's resistance to change as a personification of the general Southern sentiment under which Faulkner was raised this moment gains clarity.

Luster hit Queenie again and swung her to the left at the monument. / For an instant Ben sat in an utter hiatus. Then he bellowed. Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound. (320)

A moment like this can be awkward for the “normal” individuals reading the novel. Why could such an insignificant change, such as a left turn rather than a right, cause such emotional turmoil? Yet, one could ask the same of the stubbornness that characterized the southern states following the results of the Civil War. Benjy ultimately demonstrates the foolishness of obstinacy—something that challenges our patience when it manifests in the other, though something that we often feel warranted within our own lives.

By the end of *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader must come to grips with his or her own judgments of the mentally disabled Compson. Regardless of whether or not the first narrative of the novel is a trustworthy account, one has come to see that, though its narrator is the only one diagnosed as disabled, he is hardly the only Compson who is disabled. The moral decline of the Compson family has wreaked havoc on every one of its members and also on those who are close to the family. Faulkner has established a perplexing situation in this novel. The reader unites with the Compson family in

“othering” Benjy. As the reader then observes the way Benjamin’s absurdities play themselves out in the other members of his family, he or she must reflect on his or her own attitudes regarding change and acceptance in a world in constant transition.

## 2: TOMMY AS AN *UNCANNY* ELEMENT IN FAULKNER'S *SANCTUARY*

For the majority of people born without any form of impairment, there can be a level of discomfort in interactions with people who are. There is a fear inherent in things we don't understand, which prompts us to distance ourselves from those things. This discomfort gets more complicated when those failures to understand are attached to human beings. In his sensational horror novel, *Sanctuary*, William Faulkner relies on the uncanny nature of disabilities to create an unsettling situation for his young victim, Temple Drake. Included in the assortment of people with disabilities he utilizes is the mentally-impaired Tommy. This chapter analyzes the character of Tommy, demonstrating that in light of Freud's work on the Uncanny and on Fetishism, Faulkner employs a mentally handicapped character to exploit the terror of isolation and to interrogate his readers' understanding of solace. In this text, which is often compared to the traditional gothic novel, Tommy's role as a monstrous being, both as a mentally deficient human and as an extra-natural figure, is crucial, but unfortunately his role is not always granted fair treatment in the novel's critical analyses. In her essay, Elizabeth M. Kerr reduces Tommy's contribution to the novel's gothicism to one brief and dismissive sentence: "Tommy, the humorous servant, was too simple and innocent to fear Popeye and was killed for trying to protect Temple, in the hope that she would keep her promise to him" (91). Contrary to such opinions, Tommy's role is vital as an uncanny element at Old Frenchman's Place. Tommy acts as both a sanctuary for the lost and horrified Temple and as a threat to her safety as well as to her purity and her future.

According to the author himself, *Sanctuary's* writing seemed to have been less about making an artistic statement than it was about making money. "To me it was a

cheap idea,” runs the oft-quoted introduction to the early publications of the novel, “conceived to make money” (*Sanctuary* 321–22). While his introduction does not do credit to the novel’s enormous critical merit, it does invite the readers to reflect on the various emotive tactics employed by Faulkner in a work which, according to Harold Bloom, “is the enigma among Faulkner’s novels; intended as a potboiler and moneymaker, it very nearly achieves major status and can sustain many rereadings” (6).

Simply stated, the novel, a crime drama, tells the story of a Southern lawyer who investigates a murder case in defense of his client, Lee Goodwin, who himself remains inarticulately ambiguous about his own defense. Several factors convolute the plot, including the fact that an eye-witness to the murder won’t speak out against the real murderer, also her own attacker. Additionally, having deserted his wife, the lawyer, Horace Benbow finds solace in the familial substitution of his client’s partner and child.

That said, the fact that Faulkner pays an incredible amount of attention to the silent witness in this trial, along with the abnormal quality of the characters and the events he creates, challenges his own assessment of the narrative and any genre-labels that can be attached to it. Though the novel starts with Benbow, he serving as the “detective” of this crime drama, it ends with Temple Drake. In fact the ruined young woman seems, in many ways, to be the novel’s protagonist. The anticipation of crime against her dominates the first third of the novel, the assault against her outshines the murder itself, and the trauma from which she suffers drives the remainder of the narrative, to which the criminal proceedings remain seemingly auxiliary.

Perhaps Faulkner’s assessment of this novel, then, refers to the high level of sensationalism with which he tells Temple Drake’s story. Now categorized as Southern

Gothic, the first third of the novel feels more like a horror tale than like a crime drama. This portion of the novel is set on a dilapidated farmstead, which provides Lee Goodwin, his family, and his associates with a home and a cover for their bootlegging enterprise. The eerie description of Goodwin's house recalls 19<sup>th</sup> Century descriptions of abandoned or haunted Gothic castles.

The house was a gutted ruin rising gaunt and stark out of a grove of unpruned cedar trees. It was a landmark, known as the Old Frenchman place, built before the Civil War; a plantation house set in the middle of a tract of land; of cotton fields and gardens and lawns long since gone back to jungle, which the people of the neighborhood had been pulling down piecemeal for firewood for fifty years or digging with secret and sporadic optimism for the gold which the builder was reputed to have buried somewhere about the place when Grant came through the county on his Vicksburg campaign. (8)

Temple, though virginal, is characterized as a flirtatious debutante, who coquettishly uses men for her pleasure, but fails to provide the physical reimbursement implied by her flirtations. Critics like Robert R. Moore have even gone as far as to suggest that Temple is somewhat of an agent in her own victimization<sup>3</sup>. "Until the violent act of the rape, in fact, our watching her becomes a metaphor for Temple's defilement. Faulkner builds his atmosphere of terror not with physical acts so much as with a cloying voyeurism" (Moore 124). According to Moore, even before her night at Old Frenchman's, Temple invites her downfall by playing the part of a coy, young beauty who likes the attention. Ruby marks Temple as such on the day that the two meet. "'Oh, I know your sort,' the woman said. 'Honest women. Too good to have anything to do with

common people. You'll slip out at night with the kids, but just let a man come along... Take all you can get, and give nothing'" (57). Ruby's criticism of Temple may be the strongest indictment of the latter and, according to David L. Frazier gives her more depth than the characteristic Gothic heroine: "The irony of Temple Drake is that while she is placed in the role of the Gothic heroine and resembles her superficially in several respects—enough to establish the identification so that her unlike qualities are the more striking—she is, beneath all, worse than whore because a selfish hypocrite who gives nothing for all she receives" (55). Too trusting, Temple is left to the mercy of alcoholic Gowan Stevens, who drives her onto Goodwin's property and then deserts her to salvage his own reputation.

Alarmingly poignant, Ruby's words set the mood of Temple's time at the farmstead: "And now you must come here where you're not wanted. Nobody asked you to come here. Nobody cares whether you are afraid or not. Afraid? You haven't the guts to be really afraid, anymore than you have to be in love" (61). As Ruby's words suggest, fear defines this portion of the novel. Again, some critics suggest that Temple's behavior at the Old Frenchman's Place demonstrates her desire to be desecrated. "The female animal that runs from the house and back wants to be caught" (Guerard 70). That Temple runs about in a desire to be seen may be true, but rather than demonstrating a desire to be abused, Temple's behavior suggests a scared young lady in search of a protector. Unable to find protection in her liquor-soaked companion, Temple flits from person to person, seeking refuge both from and in each in turn, her only real safety existing in the fact that she is simultaneously the prey of all and in the prayer that her predators may destroy one another before they can damage her. Her survival depends, therefore, on her remaining a



visible presence. “There are...any number of examples in the book of characters’ acts of viewing. Several moments leap to mind, such as Tommy spying on Temple through the peephole while she undresses” (Lurie 81). This situation is itself enough to terrorize a reader and to invoke his or her sympathy, yet Faulkner augments the horror of his novel by saturating the setting with a palate of uncanny elements.

Published over a decade before *Sanctuary*, Freud’s essay, “The ‘Uncanny’” explores Ernst Jentsch’s research on the topic and defines the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (825). What this means on one level is that terror stems more from those items or images that should be comforting, given their past associations, but are re-appropriated in a frightful way, than from items or images that are wholly new to a subject; thus, a doll can, in some cases, affect more fear in an individual than can a foreign-looking explosive device.

*Sanctuary* is loaded with uncanny images, which influence a reader to process this novel more as horror tale than as crime drama. One example of this, as far as Horace Benbow is concerned—he sharing the reader’s first glimpse of the Old Frenchman place—presents itself in the form of a baby kept in a box behind the stove. “[Ruby] went to the box behind the stove and drew it out and stood above it, her hands hidden in the front of her garment. Benbow stood in the middle of the room. ‘I have to keep him in the box so the rats cant get to him,’ she said” (18). Given the facts of Ruby’s situation, the image of her child in a box behind the stove should be a comforting one. The box keeps the child safe from the vermin that plague the house, since Ruby, overloaded with household chores, including numerous lengthy treks for water, cannot keep a constant eye on him. Despite the situation and the logic that warrants it, the image of baby, box, rats,

and stove unsettles the readers and causes them to fear this home and its inhabitants.

That Faulkner was familiar with the concept of the uncanny and utilized such elements in his fiction to evoke sensations of fear can be little doubted. The following excerpt, taken from Benbow's recollections of his evening at the Goodwin farmstead, acknowledges a definitive presence of uncanny elements at the house, particularly in his impression of Popeye's character:

He was thinking of the first time he had seen it, lying in a wooden box behind the stove in that ruined house twelve miles from town; of Popeye's black presence lying upon the house like the shadow of something no larger than a match falling monstrous and portentous upon something else otherwise familiar and everyday and twenty times its size; of the two of them—himself and the woman—in the kitchen lighted by a cracked and smutty lamp on a table of clean, spartan dishes and Goodwin and Popeye somewhere in the outer darkness peaceful with insects and frogs yet filled too with Popeye's presence in black and nameless threat.

(120–21)

Perhaps the most disturbing of the uncanny elements in *Sanctuary* is one that touches on another theory of Freud's. In his essay on "Fetishism," Freud suggests that a fetish grows from a person's inability to cope with the apparent castration of a female figure. Fetishes are the objects which replace said figures' missing penes (841–45). Unable to rape Temple with his own organ, Popeye must use a corn-cob as a substitute. "Faulkner makes of Popeye an 'object' (all opaque and machine-like) which is, at the same time, possessed of an inner life" (Adamowski *Popeye* 33). The cob, while it quite literally substitutes for a dysfunctional penis, can hardly be called a true fetish, as it

seems to be more an article of convenience—he raped Temple in a corn crib—than a permanent psychological substitution. Regardless of that fact, the corn-cob does reappropriate a familiar object into a horrifying tool, thereby fortifying the mood of horror and serving the plot as another uncanny object. In his own way, Popeye also acts as an uncanny figure in the narrative. A sinister man who “will never be a man, properly speaking” (*Sanctuary* 308), Popeye unsettles the readers, as well as the characters in the novel, in the very fact that, though he should be a fully functional male, he is handicapped by the issues that caused his impotence. In his exploration of the connections between Popeye and black men, John N. Duvall points out another interesting paradox that Popeye exhibits: “On the one hand, Popeye is not manly, since he is scared, it seems, of his own shadow. On the other hand, Popeye inspires fear because he is scary...Popeye thus effectively enacts two conflicting stereotypes of the black man” (*Black Sexuality* 139).

In writing about the uncanny, Freud also acknowledges that humans, in addition to objects can serve as uncanny elements, so long as there is something problematic or inhuman about them. “We can also speak of a living person as uncanny,” Freud writes, “and we do so when we ascribe evil intentions to him. But that is not all; in addition to this we must feel that his intentions to harm us are going to be carried out with the help of special powers” (834). While his essay suggests that evil intent must be ascribed to a human for him or her to cause an uncanny effect on the perceiver, I maintain that a certain unsettling element exists in most interactions involving humans with disabilities. This stems from Emmanuel Levinas’s work on the “I” and the “Other”. “To become conscious of a being,” he writes, “is then always for that being to be grasped across an

ideality and on the basis of a said” (99). When we find ourselves placed alongside individuals with the same physical and mental capabilities as we have, we allow ourselves to indulge in our egocentric rationality—to see the other as an *alter ego*. This rationality becomes problematic for us when placed alongside impaired individuals, as it becomes more difficult to make such self-substitutions. Faulkner’s use of disabled characters, like Popeye and Tommy, unsettle his other characters and the readers, who have less of an understanding of those individuals than they would with characters of like body and mind. An element of fear, then, is a natural characteristic of any relationship with a disabled individual.

Regardless of that fact, though, Faulkner reinforces the uncanny nature of the mentally impaired Tommy by granting him cat-like eyes and supernatural stealth:

Tommy’s pale eyes began to glow faintly, like those of a cat. The woman could see them in the darkness when he crept into the room after Popeye, and while Popeye stood over the bed where Temple lay. They glowed suddenly out of the darkness at her, then they went away and she could hear him breathing beside her; again they glowed up at her with a quality furious and questioning and sad and went away again and he crept behind Popeye from the room. (77)

This state, some other-worldly being into which Tommy transforms does not happen suddenly, but seems to grow as his affection for Temple increases along with his jealous hatred of the other men in the house, whom Tommy now takes as a threat. For example, when Van, Goodwin, and Popeye barge into Temple’s room to drop off the unconscious Gowan and thereby pose a threat to Temple, “Tommy drew his breath *hissing* through his ragged teeth” (74, emphasis mine).

The glowing eyes, which Faulkner later ascribes to Tommy, imbue his character with an inhumanity that supersedes his mental disability. Truly, this scene exemplifies the pattern of nightmare in the novel on which William Rossky writes,

While they provide an appropriate atmosphere for the patterns of degenerate modernity, these many instances of paralysis-with-horror also contribute even more to a sense of cosmic nightmare; they accumulate to an experience of profound terror and powerlessness within and before the chaos and illogicality of the whole of existence. (70)

Seemingly induced by an unassuaged libido, Tommy adopts daemonic qualities, which, coupled with his strength and lack of reason—that being the threshold of restraint, make him a chaotic and fearsome force, for good or bad. These characteristics are not merely perceived internally by Tommy, because the changes that occur are reflected in and observed by other characters. Popeye seems oblivious to the once lumbering and oafish, but now stealthy, Tommy's presence, and Ruby observes the supernatural glowing eyes. The daemon that Tommy becomes, likewise, registers Ruby's awareness and serves her with an interesting mix of emotions: fury, curiosity, sadness. Perhaps it is furious because it has been discovered; perhaps because its lust remains unsatisfied. Perhaps it is questioning because, like the readers and Temple, it cannot perceive who, in the house, is friend and who is foe; perhaps it lacks understanding of how to satiate its sexual hunger. Perhaps it is sad because the capacity for human empathy still exists within it.

One must also take note of the way in which the daemon follows Popeye. Throughout the novel, leading up to Tommy's death at any rate, Popeye and he seem to be bonded together. Though they act and move separate from each other, and can be

physically separated, they maintain a kinship that is unlike that of any of the other residents on the farmstead, including Lee and Ruby. Take, for example, Temple's first glimpse of the pair during the accident.

She felt herself flying through the air, carrying a numbing shock upon her shoulder and a picture of two men peering from the fringe of cane at the roadside. She scrambled to her feet, her head reverted, and saw them step into the road, the one in a suit of tight black and a straw hat, smoking a cigarette, the other bareheaded, in overalls, carrying a shotgun, his bearded face gaped in slow astonishment. (38)

Like Steinbeck's George and Lennie standing on the horizon, Popeye and Tommy provide a stark contrast to each other; however, the differences in Faulkner's pair go beyond those of Steinbeck's duo. While the weaker George relies on Lennie's strength to get work, Popeye's physical disabilities make Tommy and him oppositional in their incompleteness. Tommy has a love of alcohol, while one drink could kill Popeye. Popeye is unable to perform sexually, while Tommy hardly comprehends his sexual cravings: "From time to time [Tommy] would feel that acute surge go over him, like his blood was too hot all of a sudden, dying away into that warm unhappy feeling that fiddle music gave him" (78). Both made monstrous by the inhumanity of their impairments, their duality leads the reader to question, in this moment, which is the demon and which the angel?

The transition from Tommy to daemon provides the plot with the supernatural qualities common to Gothic literature; additionally it affects a mood of terror over Temple's evening on the Old Frenchman's farm—a mood which could be considered overkill. After all, a young girl's residing alone amid a corps of drunken men is a

terrifying situation without the addition of a monstrous cat-man. In his essay on “The ‘Uncanny’” Freud quotes Jentsch as having said, “In telling a story, one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton” (829).

Faulkner, at this moment in his novel, vividly strips Tommy of his humanity and quickens him as such an automaton. The effect this moment has on the readers’ fear of Tommy, like the sensationalistic conveyance of the novel’s overall mood of terror, seems to be excessive, his disability already delineating him as a capricious threat to Temple’s safety.

This analysis has, up to this point, been taking for granted the fact that Tommy has a mental handicap and that the supernatural effects that Faulkner assigns to him further de-normalize him by capitalizing on his ultimate inhumanity. Nevertheless, an analysis of a realistic Tommy, in terms of mental impairment, can be somewhat problematic due to the ambiguity of his capabilities. His is not as clear-cut a case as Benjamin Compson; rather, he, like many of the residents of Yoknapatawpha county, exists somewhere in the liminal spaces between the mentally incapable and the illiterate country bumpkin. A careful examination of Tommy’s situation, the perceptions of him by other characters, and his own words and actions can help to illuminate the bounds of his mental capacities.

Among the group of people who reside at the Old Frenchman place, Tommy both fits in and stands apart. The oafish man fits in with the way that the entire estate is composed of unsettling elements which contrast sharply with the ideal implicit in a Southern country estate; Tommy in this case is but one cog in a mechanism of degradation. Faulkner establishes this setting through the perspective of Horace Benbow

in the first chapter of the novel: “Three men were sitting in chairs on one end of the porch...Popeye mounted the steps, the three men looking at him and his companion. “Here’s the professor,” he said, without stopping” (8). The uncharacteristic minimalism with which Faulkner relates Benbow’s journey to the threshold itself disturbs the reader. Who are these men, sitting like an apathetic triumvirate of guards at the gate of the manor? Why do they wordlessly allow such a stranger into their home?

Further in, Benbow stays with the men, while the narrative focus follows Popeye into the kitchen. This focus continues to treat the setting as though it is an initial experience (a voice that would fit unquestionably if Benbow had entered the kitchen) though Popeye is clearly familiar with the house and its inhabitants. “A woman stood at the stove. She wore a faded calico dress. About her naked ankles a worn pair of man’s brogans, unlaced, flapped when she moved” (8). By presenting Ruby with the objectivity of unfamiliarity while she is in the presence of someone with whom she would be familiar, Faulkner creates dissonance between his characters. He further augments that tension with the verbal interactions that transpire between those characters.

Hatred seems to thicken between these two with every word they speak. ““There’s a bird out front,’ he said. / ‘Why tell me?’ she said. ‘I don’t serve Lee’s customers.’ / ‘It’s a professor,’ Popeye said. / ...‘A what?’ / ‘Professor,’ Popeye said. ‘He’s got a book with him.’ / ‘What’s he doing here?’” (9). Their tête-à-tête is marked with mutual disrespect. Instead of explaining that there will be one more for dinner, Popeye says as little as possible, expecting Ruby to assume his meaning; on the other hand, Ruby feigns disinterest and likewise says as little as possible.

The tension between these characters illustrates the overall situation, which



provides the foundation for an understanding of Tommy. Perhaps the best indication of that situation comes from Ruby's comment to Popeye, "'Yes,' the woman said. She turned back to the stove. 'I cook. I cook for crimps and spungs and feebs. Yes. I cook'" (9). Ruby's grievance indicates the make-up of the micro-society at the Old Frenchman place.

Ruby's paraphrase of "the lame, the halt, and the blind." A **crimp** is a cripple or cheat; **spung** is a variation of sponge and refers to a crook who lives off other crooks; **feeb** is abbreviation for feeble-minded. Pap is the crimp, Tommy the feeb, and Popeye himself (or any of the men who make money off Lee) the spung.

(Arnold 17)

Tommy, the feeb, is included in this community, but like each of its members, he is an outcast. Ruby uses the word "feeb" to ostracize him and to hold herself at a higher standard than him. She does the same with Pap and also with Van, Popeye, and possibly Lee, himself; however, the previous description of her, along with Popeye's pointed and disparaging remarks, includes her in the set of misfits: "'Sure,' Popeye said. 'I won't tell them that Ruby Lamar is down in the country, wearing a pair of Lee Goodwin's throwed-away shoes, chopping her own firewood. No. I'll tell them Lee Goodwin is big rich'"

(10).

Popeye and Ruby's argument stalls as the readers get their introduction to Tommy. Faulkner's description, included below, simultaneously describes a character that is clumsy and cretinous, and one that is cunning and duplicitous.

There was a shuffling sound across the porch, then a man entered. He was stooped, in overalls. He was barefoot; it was his bare feet which they had heard.

He had a sunburned thatch of hair, matted and foul. He had pale, furious eyes, a short soft beard like dirty gold in color.

“I’ll be dawg if he aint a case, now,” he said.

“What do you want?” the woman said. The man in the overalls didn’t answer. In passing, he looked at Popeye with a glance at once secret and alert, as though he were ready to laugh at a joke, waiting for the time to laugh. He crossed the kitchen with a shambling, bear-like gait, and still with that air of alert and gleeful secrecy, though in plain sight of them, he removed a loose board in the floor and took out a gallon jug. Popeye watched him... recross the floor with a kind of alert diffidence, the jug clumsily concealed below his flank; he was watching Popeye, with that expression alert and ready for mirth, until he left the room. Again they heard his bare feet on the porch. (10)

Faulkner directs attention to Tommy’s poor hygiene with his description of the man’s bare feet, unshaven face, and dirty and unkempt hair. Hatless and shoeless, Tommy presents himself as less than a typical man, as does Faulkner’s reference to his *bear*-like gait. Despite these characterizations and Ruby’s label of the man as a feeb, Faulkner uses the word “alert” four times in this initial description of Tommy. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the adjective as “Quick to act, respond, or understand; mentally or intellectually active; lively, animated” ([www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)); all of these definitions contradict the standard perception of a mentally-disabled human being, and would seem, along with his “furious eyes” which later glow like a cat’s, to suggest some extra-natural capabilities. On the other hand, Faulkner could be emphasizing the word *alert* as an overstatement here to mimic the failure of Tommy’s discretion as he quite obviously

takes a jug of alcohol from the room. After all, Tommy himself is not defined as alert, but his glance, his secrecy, his diffidence, and his expression are. In anticipation of being “found out,” Tommy exaggerates the alert responses, for which he feels the situation calls.

The novel does not mention what originally brought Tommy into Lee’s service, but the reader can infer that, strong-muscled and obedient like Steinbeck’s Lennie, he works in Lee’s service most likely for no more than a place to sleep, food to eat, and as much alcohol as he can procure from Lee’s stock. He seems content in his situation, though he knows, as is indicated by his concern for Temple, that he is surrounded by a rough crowd. As an outcast, Tommy fits into the society at Old Frenchman’s, but as a man with mental impairment he is looked down upon by his fellow outcasts.

The way in which Tommy’s peers speak of and to him in the novel is indicative of his disability, particularly when compared with his reaction to their abuses. As mentioned earlier, Ruby’s contempt for Tommy manifests itself in the way she calls him a feeb, in the way she disdains having to cook for him, and in the way she interacts with him. Dissatisfied with her domestic responsibilities, she demands, “What do you want?” when he enters the kitchen. Though often depicted alongside Tommy, Popeye seems to share Ruby’s contempt for the man. He indicates as much when he uses Tommy as a point with which to berate Ruby: “I wont tell them on Manuel street that Ruby Lamar is cooking for a dummy and a feeb too” (10). Popeye does not differentiate in his opinion or treatment of the man to anyone. He speaks in the same way to Tommy as he does about Tommy to others. Popeye lambasts Tommy’s ability to think, after the latter speaks the phrase: “I thought you was fixin to watch... ‘Don’t think,’ Popeye said, scraping at his

trouser-cuffs. ‘You’ve got along forty years without it. You do what I told you’” (45). Neither is Popeye the only member of the group that speaks so insultingly to Tommy. Van charges, “Move down Tommy...Aint you got no manners, you mat-faced bastard?” (65).

Perhaps even more indicative of Tommy’s disability than the way the others treat him is the way in which he responds to their treatments. Tommy subscribes fully to Popeye’s dominance, both acknowledging his partner’s authority and defending his actions by way of making excuses for them. “He jest caint stand fer nobody—Aint he a cur’us feller now? I be dawg ef he aint better’n a circus to—He wont stand fer nobody drinkin hyer cep Lee. Wont drink none hisself, and jest let me take one sup and I be dawg ef hit dont look like he’ll have a catfit” (45). His response to Van’s abuse is even more disheartening: “Tommy guffawed, scraping his chair along the floor” (65). That Tommy’s ill treatment by Van evokes such a comical response from him indicates that he is either wholly ignorant of the fact that he is being reviled or that he has become so used to such treatment that he joins in at his own expense. Tommy’s working vocabulary would suggest that he does understand that his peers are berating him, though he seems to think that such derision is a natural part of the community in which he finds himself. He, after all, takes his own shots at the others when he finds it safe enough for him to do so. “Skeered of sp’ilin them gal’s hands of hisn” (47), he says of Popeye at one point.

While the other characters’ maltreatment of Tommy, and his responses to such, demonstrate that his situation is more mental impairment than it is unintelligence, much can be understood about the level of Tommy’s disability from his own words and actions. Tommy may not always understand everything that transpires around him, but he does

have the capacity to reason and he can be affected by sympathy. “‘That’s Pap,’” the man said. ‘Blind and deaf both. I be dawg ef I wouldn’t hate to be in a fix wher I couldn’t tell and wouldn’t even keer whut I was eatin’ (46). Tommy is not only observant of his surroundings, but he processes them with astute awareness. He has enough cognizance to observe a fellow human being’s plight, to imagine himself in a similar situation, and to judge whether or not he, himself, has the capacity to endure such a life. If the reader can assume that Tommy is not merely parroting someone else’s speech, he or she must concede that he is as commiserative as his peers at Old Frenchman’s, if not much more so.

Despite his capacity for reason, though, Tommy comprehends the English language on an almost wholly literal level. One instance of this occurs after Tommy leads Gowan into the loft for a drink. Popeye looks for the two, calling, “‘You, Jack, up there,’ the voice said. / ‘Hyear him?’ the man whispered, shaking with silent glee. ‘Callin me Jack. My name’s Tawmmy’” (47). Tommy’s failure to register the use of the name, Jack, in a generic sense demonstrates the man’s inability to comprehend figurative language, which suggests that everything that Tommy says, must also be understood as strictly literal. This fact is pertinent for all, but is most alarming at that moment for Gowan as Tommy next states, “I reckon we better [go down]...He jest lief take a shot up through the flo as not” (47).

Another consideration in determining the level of Tommy’s disability is to contrast him with some of the other characters in the novel. The reader can understand that Tommy is less capable than a mere country bumpkin, because Faulkner includes a number of mere country bumpkins in the story: the Snopes clan. The tone of the

anecdotes featuring Virgil and Fonzo is far different from the chapters including Tommy. While Tommy has his comical moments, one cannot overlook the ever-present horror at the foundation of his sections. Meanwhile the antics of the poor, white trash are related with a light sense of frivolity, as can be seen in the following passage, which recounts Virgil's and Fonzo's problems in mistaking a whorehouse for a hotel.

They waited. The man came out and got in the cab and went away.

"Caint be her husband," Fonzo said. "I wouldn't a never left. Come on." He entered the gate.

"Wait," Virgil said.

"You can," Fonzo said. Virgil took his bag and followed. He stopped while Fonzo opened the lattice gingerly and peered in. "Aw hell," he said. He entered. There was another door, with curtained glass. Fonzo knocked.

"Why didn't you push that ere button?" Virgil said. Don't you know city folks dont answer no knock?" (192)

A couple of similarities between Tommy and the Snopeses include their misuse of English and their apparent lack of common sense. Of the latter, though, the jocularity of the Snopes episodes seems to suggest that they are capable though ignorant (a result of and comment on their background and upbringing), while the general sense conveyed through Tommy is that he is altogether incapable of functioning at the same mental level as general society for reasons beyond upbringing.

One final element of Tommy's characterization to interrogate is his sexuality. Imbued with a fully functioning adult male body, Tommy must be understood to have as active a libido as Van or Lee. The reader recognizes in Tommy a threat to Temple

because of these passions. “But soon he began to think about Temple again. He would feel his feet scouring on the floor and his whole body writhing in an acute discomfort” (68). While the reader understands the burning that Tommy experiences and recognizes the possible dangers of those urges, Tommy himself has trouble comprehending his own desires and, more relevant to the horror of situation, the proper ways to appease them. “‘He’s got a plate of grub,’ Van said. ‘He’s trying to get his with a plate full of ham.’ / ‘Get my whut?’ Tommy said” (66). While the need for sexual gratification plagues Tommy, the man has a very limited knowledge of the mechanics of sex. He admits to Temple that he had received a lesson in sex from Lee, though Duvall suggests in the fourth chapter of his book that these lessons may have been for Lee’s benefit:

Goodwin has explained coitus to Tommy perhaps so that the mentally deficient man may experiment with Temple but more likely so that Tommy will be reassured that, if she screams and fights while Goodwin rapes her, she really is not being hurt. (*Marginal Couple* 67)

From the moment that Tommy begins sexualizing Temple, his role in the novel becomes a driving question. In Tommy, will Temple find her salvation or her destruction? This question reaches its zenith following Tommy’s transformation into the daemon (77–82), a change motivated, once again, by Tommy’s sexual impulses. As the cat-man Tommy does not attack Temple; however, one must question his motives for keeping such a close watch over the young woman. Is the reader to understand that Tommy has become a guardian spirit or a jealous fiend? The question is never quite answered; Tommy is murdered before the truth is discovered. As the events transpire, Temple comes to rely on Tommy as her protector; however, he seems to be under the

impression that she will give herself to him sexually.

“Lee says hit wont hurt you none. All you got to do is lay down...” It was a dry sort of sound, not in her consciousness at all, nor his pale eyes beneath the shaggy thatch. She leaned in the door, wailing, trying to shut it. Then she felt his hand clumsily on her thigh. “...says hit wont hurt you none. All you got to do is...”

She looked at him, his diffident hard hand on her hip. “Yes,” she said, “all right. Don’t you let him in.” (100)

Unable to find an alternative place of refuge, Temple promises herself to Tommy and in so doing puts the man into an early grave. While Aubrey Williams aggrandizes Tommy as a character who “cannot mature in evil,” she is astute in her analysis of the man’s death: “Killed by Popeye the instant before Temple’s rape, Tommy’s death serves to suggest, in somewhat ritualistic fashion, the ‘death’ of Temple’s ‘childhood’ and her introduction to adult and evil ‘reality’” (62 emphasis author’s). Whether Temple lied completely to Tommy in an empty promise made out of desperation or whether she chose Tommy as a better alternative than Popeye, Van, or Lee remains as yet another of the novel’s unanswered questions.

With Temple Drake emerging as the novel’s victim, Faulkner relies on a level of pluralism in his readers’ understanding of mental impairment, to create the bonds of sympathy between them and his protagonist. As a childlike man or mannish child, Tommy exists simultaneously as a solace and a threat. Immediately following the car crash, Temple seems to fear Tommy as much as she does anyone else, perhaps even more than she does Popeye of whom she says, “Does that black man think he can tell me what to do?” (42). She doesn’t speak that way to or about Tommy. In fact, she says very little



to him as first.

Temple's initial anxiety regarding Tommy is meant to be shared with the readers whose own fear is augmented with the omniscient perspective and symbolism. For example, though Temple does not know it, the reader is familiar with Tommy's indifference toward violence and death from an earlier conversation with Benbow about Popeye:

“Here he was comin up the path to the porch and that ere dog come out from under the house and went up and sniffed his heels, like ere a dog will, and I be dog if he didn't flinch off like it was a moccasin and him barefoot, and whupped out that little artermatic pistol and shot it dead as a door-nail. I be durn if he didn't.”

“Whose dog was it?” Horace asked.

“Hit was mine,” Tommy said. He chortled. “A old dog that wouldn't hurt a flea if hit could.” (19)

Armed with an understanding of the insensitivity to life that Tommy displays here, the readers approach Tommy's actions with a greater degree of anxiety. Perhaps they perceive, better than Temple, the threat of Tommy's interest in her. “The man watched her, looking at the slippers. ‘Durn ef I could git ere two of my fingers into one of them things,’ he said. ‘Kin I look at em?’” (41). The symbolism of this passage reinforces the threat that Temple is only starting to feel. The sexuality of Tommy's gaze transforms her slipper into the young woman's vaginal cavity. Tommy's vocal desire to penetrate that cavity with the width of two fingers reveals his internal desire to penetrate her vagina with his penis and reminds the readers that he is a sexual being and that he objectifies her

as a way to satiate his desire. “He returned the slipper slowly, looking at her, at her belly and loins. ‘He aint laid no crop by yit, has he?’” (41). Not lost on the readers, as they continue through the narrative, is the fact that Tommy is most likely potent, unlike Popeye; therefore, in regards to procreation, he presents a greater threat to her and her future than does Popeye.

Despite Tommy’s lust for Temple, the young woman turns to him for salvation once she reassesses Gowan’s capability to function as her protector. Fearful of the men at Old Frenchman’s place, Temple is reluctant to join the gathering at dinner; however, when left with no option but to join them, she chooses to sit near Tommy rather than near Gowan. “After a moment she saw Tommy. She went straight toward him, as if she had been looking for him all the while” (64). As her fear of all of the men on the farmstead increases, Temple seems to find in Tommy’s child-like innocence a form of safety that supersedes his capacity for harm. She is not altogether misguided in the tack she takes with Tommy. The man readily adopts the role of Temple’s protector. He appeals to Lee on her behalf: “‘Why don’t them fellers quit pesterin that gal?’ / ‘Who’s pestering her?’ / ‘Van is. She’s skeered. Whyn’t they leave her be?’ / ‘It’s none of your business. You keep out of it. You hear?’ / ‘Them fellers ought to quit pesterin her,’ Tommy said” (67).

By serving as both her protector and her pursuer, Tommy uncannily becomes for Temple Drake an unreliable sanctuary, a role that he shares with the Old Frenchman’s place in general, with the whorehouse later on, with her own misrepresentation of the truth at the culmination of the novel, and, in a way, with the old ideals of Southern gentry which were failing by Temple’s time. As he does, to varying degrees, with Pap’s and Popeye’s physical disabilities, Faulkner utilizes mental disability in this novel to unsettle

his audience. The uncanny nature of Tommy, a character that is human and at the same time isn't quite, reveals itself in the plurality with which both Temple and the reader must understand Tommy. He is, while living, both the greatest threat to her survival and her greatest source for sanctuary.

### 3: UNSTABLE GROUND: THE ROLE OF DARL'S MENTAL INSTABILITY IN *AS I LAY DYING*

“Sometimes I aint so sho who’s got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint. Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way” (233). Cash, the eldest of Anse and Addie Bundren’s children, questions his brother’s alleged lunacy and, in so doing, invites the readers of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* to interrogate the concept of normality. The novel, claimed by Faulkner himself to be a tour-de-force<sup>4</sup>, is a complex work, evidenced by a multitude of narrators who share differing values, often speak vaguely, and transition between retrospection, current details, and foreshadowing without warning. A comment on the effects of change, the novel relates the tale of the Bundren family, poor Southern country people who undertake a quest to fulfill their matriarch’s dying wish of being buried miles away from the Bundren home. Though the task affects each member of the family differently, one of the most ambiguous cases is that of Darl. Sent to a mental institution by the end of the novel, Darl presents an interesting study on mental instability. His situation encourages a variety of interpretations in addition to the questions on sanity that his brother Cash poses: some would suggest that he is never sane, others that he loses his sanity over the course of the novel, still others that he does not lose his sanity at all. This chapter enters that investigation by closely examining the characterization of Darl through the other members of his community, through the other members of his family, and through Darl’s own words and actions. Incorporating ambiguity into the characterization of Darl, Faulkner invites his readers to challenge their preconceived understandings of normality and sanity, and thereby incites in his novel a

paradigm shift of values. When, as Cash's statement suggests, mental stability is determined by majority rule, one must be wary of any shift that could disrupt the balance.

The language that Faulkner uses in *As I Lay Dying* is often minimalistic and vague. His regular use of pronouns with unclear antecedents leaves his readers puzzled and wanting clarity, as it does when Darl narrates, "He is coming up the road behind us, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, moving only from his hips down" (209). Darl describes Jewel's return to the family after having deserted them (191) when his father expected him to trade away his horse. Darl never mentions that it's Jewel "coming up the road," though, and the audience won't learn that until they read it in Vardaman's ensuing account. Combined with Faulkner's use of unclear antecedents, the semi-linear structure of the novel—using multiple narrators, with no clear indicator of when the act of narrating takes place, causes events to be referred to in advance of or well after the occurrence of those events within the chronology of the narrative—and the overall work becomes a mystery begging for solution. José Angel García Landa explores this quality of the novel, writing, "In most of the Bundrens' sections, the present tense seems to indicate a simultaneity between the story time and the moment of narrating. In the 'chorus' sections by other characters, usually written in the past tense, the narrating vantage point remains undefined, but in an inconspicuous way which does not disturb the smooth progress of the novel" (63).

Because of these issues with the readability of the text, Faulkner's audience must take care in piecing together the clues of his narrative. His implementation of multiple narrators, a seemingly random potpourri of chroniclers, encourages his readers not to take any point of characterization at face-value, but rather, to weigh each narrator's

evaluations against every other's.

When analyzing the novel with a focus on mental illness, readers may identify Darl as the character most conflicted. Such is the case with Pettey, who claims, "Dominating *As I Lay Dying* are Darl's desires to reconcile perceptions with existence, specifically his frustrated attempts to construct his world, while simultaneously destroying Addie's influence over him" (27). Brother Vardaman says of him, "Darl is my brother. Darl went crazy" (250). "Crazy" he is called by the end of the novel and "crazy" he acts. In his own final narration, he speaks of himself in the third person: "Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams. 'Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes'" (254).

Although this diagnosis remains with the reader at the conclusion of the novel, it may not be the one that the reader starts with. Many moments exist throughout the novel in which Darl comes across as one of the more mentally acute members of the Bundren family or even of Yoknapatawpha county en masse; therefore, the questions arise: when, how, and why does Darl become crazy? In order to attempt an answer to these questions, one must carefully interrogate every thought or comment about Darl at every interval of the narrative. The novel's absence of exposition, then, makes even the slightest recollection of even its most minor characters pivotal.

Through the observations of the minor characters that make up the Bundrens' neighbors, Faulkner gives every indication that even by Bundren standards, Darl's mental acuity fails to meet the community's norm. The first indication that Darl unsettles the local community comes from the actions of one of the visitors at Addie's bedside.

Neighbor Cora relates that “Eula watches [Darl] as he goes on and passes from sight again toward the back. Her hand rises and touches her beads lightly, and then her hair. When she finds me watching her, her eyes go blank” (9). While nothing in this observation overtly points toward Darl’s mental instability, Eula’s curiosity, in the way she stares, and discomfort, in her fidgeting mannerisms, introduce a question to the audience. At this point in the novel, Eula’s behavior could indicate any number of things about Darl from possible sexual interest to some sort of history between the two, or, as turns out to be the most likely case, discomfort over Darl’s reputation in the community.

That reputation becomes a bit clearer for the audience in a later chapter, also narrated by Cora. She says:

It was Darl, the one that folks say is queer<sup>5</sup>, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse, with Cash a good carpenter and always more building than he can get around to, and Jewel always doing something that made him some money or got him talked about, and that near-naked girl always standing over Addie with a fan so that every time a body tried to talk to her and cheer her up, would answer for her right quick, like she was trying to keep anybody from coming near her at all (24).

In her brief analyses of the Bundren family members, Cora provides the reader with the novel’s first verbalization that the community finds Darl to be queer, and while she is the outsider who shares the majority of those attitudes with the audience, she herself does not seem to subscribe to the commonly held opinion. From the way she wordlessly corrects Eula’s stare on page 9 to the way she chastises her husband for participating in the gossip—“you’re one of the folks that says Darl is the queer one, the one that aint bright,

and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon” (152)—Cora clearly takes a stand in defense of Darl’s peculiarity as one not of mental deficiency but one of advanced perception. The one she identifies as being “touched by God himself and considered queer by us mortals” (167–68), her husband and others find discomfiting and subhuman; however, that analysis on their part lacks credibility, as Darl’s propensity to thinking forms the basis for the accusations of his mental instabilities.

Cora’s husband, Tull, claims, “The Lord aimed for [a fellow] to do and not to spend too much time thinking...that’s ever living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much” (71). Most intelligent readers would analyze Tull’s criticism as more of an indictment against himself and the mainstream community than as any form of valid justification of Darl’s queerness; however, it is not a propensity to thought alone that ostracizes Darl from his community. “More than anything else, his bemused, uncompromising silence, combined with an intensely contemplative gaze, alienates Tull and most of the people around him” (Delville 68–69). Were it merely a pensive demeanor that characterizes him, no doubt men like Tull would find him different, though not necessarily queer or mentally dysfunctional. Darl’s penetrating gaze has a way of unsettling others and suggests that Darl’s mental instability may have existed long before the evening of the fire. Tull indicates this discomfort in the presence of Addie’s second-born with the following introspection:

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



doings outen his eyes. (125)

This accusation provides the most substantial claim by anyone outside the family to suggest that Darl's "queerness" amounts to a lifelong battle with mental instability; yet, these attitudes could do more to characterize the quality of Darl's peers than of Darl himself. "That's what unsettles Darl's family and others: not so much his gaze, but the way it transforms them. They become objects of Darl's subjectivity but he does not become the object of their subjectivity...Tull frames this scene by objectifying himself in the presence of what he cannot comprehend" (Petty 30). While community claims that demonstrate Darl as a thinker and a starrer do more to indicate that Darl has higher cognitive capabilities than his neighbors, Tull's observation of the way Darl stares at him, and the resulting discomfort, suggest that, if Darl is not deranged, he at the very least exhibits some social deficiencies. Social deficiencies, though, do not equate with insanity and, if nothing else, serve to include Darl among a variety of socially inept characters who share the name of Bundren.

In order to gain an adequate understanding of Darl as an individual, then, one must also contrast him with his peers—in this case, the members of his family—by analyzing their observations of and comments about him. One can hardly claim, after all, that Darl's peculiarities are nothing more than oddities typical to the Bundrens when his own older brother says of him, "This world is not his world; this life, his life" (261).

Anse Bundren, the patriarch, is depicted as lazy and relies on his family to ensure his own peace of body and mind. Cognizant of Darl's reputation in the community, Anse does little to refute or to repair the situation; rather, he contents himself in making certain that blame for his son's behavior lands on anyone but him. As the family begins their trek

to Jefferson, a laughing fit seizes Darl. Anse reflects, “How many times I told him it’s doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him, I dont know. I says I got some regard for what folks says about my flesh and blood even if you haven’t...when you fixes it so folks can say such about you, it’s a reflection on your ma, I says, not me” (105–06). Though Anse fails to identify Darl’s behavior as a big enough problem for Darl or the community to have him institutionalized, his observation and analysis of his son’s actions support, for the readers, the suggestion that Darl is mentally unstable more so than do any of the outsiders in the novel. Anse seems to believe that his son’s instabilities are more indicative of simple foolishness than mental illness—as though his condition is one that he (Darl) can choose to switch on or off—and he (Anse) only grows concerned when that condition jeopardizes his own peaceful security, as happens when implications of Darl’s need to be institutionalized threaten the loss of one of Anse’s field hands.

And Darl too. Talking me out of him, durn them. It aint that I am afraid of work; I always is fed me and mine and kept a roof above us: it’s that they would short-hand me just because he tends to his own business, just because he’s got his eyes full of the land all the time. I says to them, he was alright at first, with his eyes full of the land, because the land laid up-and-down ways then; it wasn’t till that ere road come and switched the land around longways and his eyes still full of the land, that they begun to threaten me out of him, trying to short-hand me with the law. (36–37)

While no direct mention of institutionalization is made here, the reference to the new road suggests that Darl is more visible to the community and the community is more accessible to him. Anse’s being “short-handed with the law” implies that the community

meant at some time to legally remove Darl from Anse's custody. Combining that with the explanation, "just because he's got his eyes full of the land," which rules out the possibility that Darl was involved in some criminal activity, leaves one to assume that there was a push to have Darl institutionalized. That push is critical to a study on Darl's mental state throughout the novel in that it precedes the death of Addie, precedes the family's trek to Jefferson, and precedes the burning of Gillespie's barn. Regardless, Anse, at the time, cares less about the mental health of his son, than he does about the threat his son's absence would have on Anse's workload.

For Addie Bundren to say much of Darl or his condition, would be for Addie Bundren not to be Addie Bundren. She views her life as preparation to be dead; she views her children—those conceived by Anse at any rate—to be her husband's and not hers. "[Cora] would tell me what I owed to my children and to Anse and to God. I gave Anse the children. I did not ask for them" (174). Following Jewel's birth, Addie resolves to prepare for death: "Then there was only the milk, warm and calm, and I lying calm in the slow silence, getting ready to clean my house" (176). Cleaning house involved giving Anse two more children—one to make up for the child conceived by Whitfield and one to make up for the child she could not conceive with Anse while pregnant with Jewel. Addie's relationship with Darl is crucial to an investigation of his madness because, as several critics suggest, her rejection of him is the foundation of his instability. Harold Hellwig, who points out elements of Greek tragedy in the novel, even suggested that the two are bonded as the novel's scapegoats.

Darl, as the other *pharmakos*, is the author-figure, the man of vision and of madness, cast out by the Bundren family, the wounded hero; he is committed to

an insane asylum, having set fire to Gillespie's barn in a failed attempt to end the farcical journal [sic]. Darl has the prescience of Tiresias. He sees things he cannot actually see, reads minds, and accurately delineates character with language.

Given that Addie has rejected him as an outrage, and ignores him in life, Darl exists without a mother, just as Jewel exists without a father. (201)

Unwilling to let Anse or their children disrupt her solitude, Addie ignores Darl, and her rejection of him encourages his inability to attain self-recognition. The aforementioned change that Addie undergoes, in regard to her final three children, is also noteworthy in that it informs a distinct bond between the two elder children. "When I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them" (173).

Characterized as taciturn for the majority of the novel, Cash, Anse's eldest son, is uncharacteristically reflective where Darl is concerned. For almost the initial third of the novel, Cash remains silent except for the ever-present murmur of his tools as he works on constructing the casket, which will house the remains of his mother. His first narration, a list of thirteen benefits of building the coffin with beveled seams, demonstrates the depth of his pragmatism.

When Cash talks, he typically speaks briefly and concisely; however, his explication surprises the reader following Darl's arrest:

I see all the while how folks could say he was queer, but that was the very reason couldn't nobody hold it personal. It was like he was outside of it too, same as you, and getting mad at it would be kind of like getting mad at a mud-puddle that

splashed you when you stepped in it. (237)

Most surprising is not the volume that Cash speaks, but the quality of what he says.

He admits a level of empathy for his younger brother, while interrogating the very notion of insanity: “It’s like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it’s the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it” (233). Of all the Bundrens, Cash maintains that Darl’s arrest may have been, to a degree, unnecessary. Darl breaks the law by burning another man’s barn, but his motivation for that action is to end quickly the macabre parade that his mother’s dying wish has become. For Cash, the issue of mental stability is not a black-and-white one; he is conflicted between an understanding of societal expectations and an awareness of what he perceives are Darl’s moral obligations. Cash has difficulty being overly critical of Darl’s behavior, because on one level, he applauds it. “And me being the oldest, and thinking already the very thing that he done: I don’t know” (234). Cash compares himself to Darl, but finally supports the law. Though he could attempt to understand Darl’s actions—could imagine himself doing the same thing—he realizes that ultimately he would not have done the same thing:

I don't reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he cant see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they aint nothing else to do with him but what the most folks say is right. (233–34)

Cash recognizes that the line between sanity and insanity is self-control to the extent that one monitors oneself to comply with the standards that society sets in place. He suggests that those who fail to adhere to the propriety of the masses must be prepared to submit to whatever corrections those masses choose to administer, regardless of whether or not

those corrections are morally sound. “Cash correctly adduces that the normal range of behavior for his family draws a very fine line between lucidity and complete absurdity. He has a chance to save Darl from the sanitarium, but he refuses because he cannot relinquish his concept of one’s responsibilities for one’s actions, no matter how just those actions be” (Petty 43).

A firm believer in just deserts, Jewel exists as a sharp contrast to his eldest brother. His sense of restitution can be observed in the process through which he obtained, and the means by which he maintained, his horse. Jewel did not view that horse as a family acquisition; he devoted his time and strength into earning the animal, and he accepted the full rights and responsibilities of ownership. “Jewel looked at pa, his eyes paler than ever. ‘He wont never eat a mouthful of yours,’ he said. ‘Not a mouthful. I’ll kill him first. Dont you never think it. Dont you never’” (136). For Jewel the issue of Darl’s mental instability is nothing but black-and-white. “‘Catch him and tie him up,’ Jewel said. ‘Goddamn it, do you want to wait until he sets fire to the goddamn team and wagon?’” (233). In Jewel’s eyes, Darl’s actions have earned him incarceration, and he makes it a personal goal to help see that punishment is meted out appropriately. He may of course be motivated personally as well. Jewel was, after all, the only Bundren to suffer from the fire, and he did so both physically and financially—Cash correctly identifies that “it was the value of [Jewel’s] horse Darl tried to burn up” (233). Whether motivated by a sense of revenge or by a universal sense of justice, Jewel pushes for the swift arrest of Darl, even lending a hand to make it possible.

Also aiding in the cause of justice against Darl, is his sister, Dewey Dell, who learned of his guilt from their youngest brother Vardaman. Cash admits that, “It was

Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him. And then I believed I knowed how Gillespie knowed about how his barn taken fire” (237). While it is questionable that Jewel may have been motivated strictly by personal reasons to turn in his brother, there is no question about Dewey Dell’s personal motivation. Darl knows her secret. At worst he can ruin her reputation; at best he will ever be a reminder of the abortion she plans on executing, and she cannot bear to allow his maintenance of that power over her. “The artist is Darl—the rejected seer, oracle, prophet; separated from the others, apparently uncaring and uninvolved, alienated and finally excommunicated. Jewel and Dewey Dell, the others abetting, get him, fix him. Like the abortion Dewey Dell wants desperately to get to town for, this ‘fixing’ will eliminate the tell-tale indicator of the truths about themselves” (Slaughter 28). Dewey Dell does not identify in Darl’s “queerness” a mental inefficiency; rather she fears in him a supernatural mental acuity. Dewey Dell fears Darl’s cognizance because she recognizes his awareness of the secret child she carries.

I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know and I said ‘Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?’ without the words I said it and he said ‘Why?’ without the words. And that’s why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows. (27)

Dewey Dell’s involvement in Darl’s incarceration has little to do with a moral obligation to get her brother help for his mental illness and nothing to do with any sense of propriety for Gillespie; rather, she takes action against her brother for pure self-preservation. She

says, “The land runs out of Darl’s eyes; they swim to pin points. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules, above the travail...I rose and took the knife from the streaming fish still hissing and I killed Darl” (121). For that reason, Dewey Dell informs on Darl to Gillespie and for that reason she, before anyone else present, “jump[s] on him like a wild cat” (237). “The analogue of a feral cat shows her independence and animalistic nature. Her violent pounce onto Darl demonstrates a refusal to be dominated” (Kovesdy 263). When Vardaman tells Dewey Dell that he saw Darl set the fire, he hands her the knife with which she can kill him.

Young Vardaman has a difficult time understanding anything that goes on around him. Often exhibiting unstable behaviors himself, the youngest Bundren serves more as a reflector of the words and attitudes of the adults in the novel than as an independent voice in narrative. Be that as it may, an investigation into whether Darl’s craziness was atypical of, or rather was a natural quality of, Bundren behavior on the whole benefits from Vardaman’s poignant announcement: “*He went crazy and went to Jackson both. Lots of people didn’t go crazy. Pa and Cash and Jewel and Dewey Dell and me didn’t go crazy. We never did go crazy. We didn’t go to Jackson either*” (251 emphasis author’s).

If one were limited to the words and attitudes of the Bundrens’ neighbors, he or she would identify that Darl is queer in that he thinks too much and has an unsettling stare. Those with a more accepting sense of optimism may join Cora Tull in thinking that Darl is a highly gifted and vapidly misunderstood individual, though not one that is insane. In the novel, oddity and the Bundren name are somewhat synonymous, which leaves the reader to question whether Darl is actually any crazier than the rest of his



family. The consensus among them seems to be affirmative; however, the fact being that none of Darl's parents or siblings quite agree on what constitutes his insanity, or on what kind of real threat it constitutes for the county, a follow-up question must be posed: are the Bundrens reliable assessors of Darl's mental health? If one is to determine how queer Darl is apart from his identity as a Bundren, he or she must also determine what queer characteristics, if any exist, are exhibited by the other Bundrens.

Out of all of the Bundren family members, the one that seems most mentally disturbed is the youngest. Vardaman, a boy of nine years, has a difficult time coming to grips with the death of his mother and the majority of his mental issues stem from that event. As Addie lay dying, Vardaman encounters death's effects on a fish, which he caught from a stream. "It slides out of his hands, smearing wet dirt onto him, and flops down, dirtying itself again, gap mouthed, goggle-eyed, hiding into the dust like it was ashamed of being dead, like it was in a hurry to get back hid again. Vardaman cusses it. He cusses it like a grown man, standing a-stradle of it" (31). His discovery of the finality of death mortifies the boy into destroying the fish's remains. "It is cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls" (53). Vardaman understands what death is; when Addie passes, he realizes she is gone, and to deal with his grief he lays the blame on Dr. Peabody. "'He kilt her,' he says. He begins to cry... 'She never hurt him and he come and kilt her'" (63). Vardaman has the most trouble comprehending his mother's corpse. "It is not her. I know. I was there. I saw when it did not be her. I saw" (66). The boy copes, for the remainder of the novel, with the understanding that "My mother is a fish" (84).

As a child, Vardaman provides an interesting parallel to Darl in the novel,

particularly when the subject of mental illness is raised. Readers may feel the desire to credit the boy with a child-like naivete; on the other hand, Vardaman could be struggling with his own level of mental impairment. His inability to come fully to grips with Addie's death prompts him to drill breathing holes in the casket (73), and at Darl's encouragement he claims to hear her corpse praying in the wooden box (214–15). Vardaman's confusion of cause and effect color his understandings of life and death. The doctor comes and Addie dies; therefore he must have killed her. She is nailed into a wooden box, yet living things need air to breathe; therefore he drills the unnecessary holes. Vardaman's own difficulties in coping with his mother's death, whether true childlike innocence or mental instability, help, by way of contrast, the reader to get a sense of Darl's character.

While Vardaman is plagued by despair over the loss of his mother, his sister, blinded by her own desperation, pays little thought to the death, following her initial, melodramatic reaction in which “she flings herself across Addie Bundren's knees, clutching her, shaking her with the furious strength of the young before sprawling suddenly across the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left, jarring the whole bed into a chattering sibilance of mattress shucks” (49). Dewey Dell's pregnancy preoccupies her mind and seems to motivate every action she takes. Unmarried, she has made the choice, at partner Lefe's suggestion, to terminate the pregnancy, and she utilizes the journey—to fulfill her dead mother's funeral request—to attempt to accomplish that abortion. If Darl's lunacy is diagnosable through the fact that he thinks in an abnormal way, one cannot overlook the thoughts that Dewey Dell reveals about herself at the time of her mother's death. Wondering whether Dr. Peabody would assist her with an

abortion, she reduces him, herself, and humankind to individual tubs of guts and follows him around, thinking, “He could do everything for me. It’s like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room in it for anything else very important. He is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts” (58). These gruesome thoughts, as well as the aforementioned vision she has of stabbing Darl, are just as incriminating as any of the unusual thoughts for which Darl is ostracized; however, Dewey Dell neither vocalizes nor acts on her thoughts the way that Darl does.

If sanity can be measured in the difference between thought and action, then one must look closer at Jewel. His actions in the novel are often erratic and dangerous. An example of this is when the stinking wagon approaches Jefferson and Jewel almost gets into a fight with a pedestrian who mistakenly thinks Jewel called him a ‘son of a bitch’ (229–31). Seemingly dis-attached from the family, Jewel values his independence and even the simplest of his choices can be seen as illogical. In the opening of the novel, Jewel walks directly through a building rather than take the few extra steps to follow the given path. Darl relates, “Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window...he crosses the floor in four strides...and steps in a single stride through the opposite window into the path again just as I come around the corner” (4). Benjamin Widiss utilizes this scene to also identify a competitive undercurrent to Jewel and Darl’s entire relationship. “Darl and Jewel jockey more or less consciously with each other for the preeminent position, not only in ascending the path to the house, but also, more explicitly and more importantly, in their rivalry for Addie’s affections” (108). Undercutting Jewel’s self-endorsed isolation, though, remains a sense of responsibility to the family, which puts him in peril time and again. He alone carries

the weight of his dead mother as the casket is loaded in the wagon (98–99), he risks drowning to save Cash's tools (156–164), and he gets burnt in a fire to prevent single-handedly the cremation of his mother's corpse (221–222). Though his actions demonstrate a self-sacrificing love for his family, a sane person would question whether the gains are worth the potential loss of his life.

In contrast to his family members, Cash exhibits a position of level-headedness. His pragmatism along with his skill as a carpenter mark him as a character who maintains a literal focus on balance. That is, until, as Widiss avers:

His leg is broken. Imbalance then becomes Cash's own attribute, the injury requiring, in Peabody's words, that he "limp around on one short leg for the balance of [his] life" (240). Cash's equipoise is metaphorically imperiled here—a fact registered by his internal questioning of the way family and community have disposed of Darl: "Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way" (233). In this last, "balance" almost means its opposite—an overwhelming preponderance; a man isn't sane or insane, but rocks back and forth, until communal consensus weighs in unequivocally, suspending him high in the air. (109)

Typically one to do for others, Cash's self-sacrificing attitude often puts him in peril. His inability to force his position that the casket, carrying an inverted Addie, is unstable led to his broken leg, and his refusal to acknowledge the pain in his broken leg leads to the complications that follow.

In many ways, the Bundren who exhibits the most abnormal behavior is the head of the household. Through his role as patriarch to this family, hypocritical Anse looks

more to be supported by them than he tries to support them. Early in the novel, Darl explains, “There is no sweat stain on his shirt. I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it” (17). Darl’s “supposition” suggests that he, and most likely everybody but Anse, does not believe it. Anse’s hypocrisy reveals itself in his diatribe against city-folk. For someone with such a condition as his, he is quick to say, “Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats” (110). To ‘be beholden unto nobody’ is a mantra of the old man’s, but the patriarch excludes his kin from that mantra. Though Jewel ultimately decided to submit his horse to a trade, Anse bargains it off without asking (190). He takes Dewey Dell’s abortion allowance despite her pleas not to (207), and he uses the money to buy himself some new teeth (260). Similarly, he steals money from Cash when the latter is incapacitated (190). Anse misuses his family in non-financial ways as well. He insists that Cash’s broken leg be cemented: “‘It’ll be easier on you,’ pa says. ‘It’ll keep it from rubbing together.’ / ‘I can last it,’ Cash says. ‘We’ll lose time stopping.’ / ‘We done bought the cement, now,’ pa says... ‘We done bought it now’” (207); however, when criticized later by Gillespie, Anse passes the blame onto his ‘crazy’ son: “It was Darl put it on” (224).

To a person, each of the Bundrens exhibits qualities that characterize him or her as abnormal in comparison with mainstream society; therefore, one must recognize a level of unreliability of each as assessors of Darl’s “normality”. Rather, their attitudes regarding his intellect must be weighed against the young man’s own thoughts, words

and actions in the novel.

An analysis of Darl through his own words and actions can be somewhat problematic. The character is highly complex, often demonstrating a cognitive awareness that is far keener than that of his peers, but that at times reaches nonsensical extremes. From the attitudes of his family and neighbors, Darl is abnormal; however, the associates of the Bundrens, and to a greater extreme the Bundrens themselves, are characterized as flagrantly aberrant. One must avoid making the erroneous assumption that the abnormal is normal. In other words, a figure deemed 'odd' by odd people could be the opposite of odd; alternatively, he could be a more radical specimen of oddity. Through a careful look at Darl himself, the reader may discern that, despite the sense he often makes, he lacks a full and appropriate functionality of intellect.

From the beginning of the novel, Darl comes across as being intellectually superior to the rest of the Bundrens. In fact, were it not for the references to Darl's "queerness" by the other characters there would be little question regarding his mental stability, and the non-traditional observations that he makes—"It takes two people to make you and one people to die. That's how the world is going to end" (39)—convey an acuity of the human experience, which invites reflection.

Like Benjy Compson's, Darl's narrations sometimes demonstrate a level of synesthesia, which is uncommon to established norms. When he and his family first transport Addie's coffin to the wagon, Darl perceives, "Jewel's face goes completely green and I can hear teeth in his breath" (98). Darl's observation, as bizarre as it is, has merit, because, shortly afterwards, Jewel makes the decision to figuratively and literally bear the full burden of Addie Bundren's death on himself. Darl reflects, "It seems to me

that the end which I now carry alone has no weight, as though it coasts like a rushing straw upon the furious tide of Jewel's despair" (98–99). The identification Darl makes of Jewel's emotions and not his muscles carrying the weight of Addie, juxtaposed with the present tense of his narration, substantiate the abstract quality of Darl's intellect. Darl does not seem at this moment to be analyzing past events; rather, he appears to view moments as they occur in abstract ways. While such a mind could be considered queer to societal standards, it does not provide the definitive diagnosis of insanity.

While Dewey Dell's, and to a degree Jewel's, fear of Darl stems from what she suggests is some supernatural extra-perception, Faulkner includes highly rational moments in Darl's narration which depict reasonably impressive levels of metacognitive awareness. Though the reader is left unclear as to how Darl knows about Dewey Dell's pregnancy or about Jewel's illegitimacy, he or she reads moments of understanding-through-observation on the part of Darl, as happens when Addie makes special allowances for Jewel's exhaustion:

...she found some way for Dewey Dell and Vardaman to do [Jewel's chores].

And doing them herself when pa wasn't there. She would fix him special things to eat and hide them for him. 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. (130)

According to this narration by Darl, there is nothing clairvoyant in his first seeing his mother as a person capable of deception. He observes it in the concrete facts that every Bundren (with the exception of Anse) has access to. This moment, which also acts as

foreshadowing for Addie's revelation of the larger deception, which caused her pregnancy with Jewel, could suggest that Darl's knowing that Jewel and he had different fathers resulted from piecing together a multitude of intervening observations.

In fact, that entire narration of Darl's does little to support that he is anything but mentally capable. In the pages following the account recorded above, Darl carries on an extremely reasonable conversation with Cash, in which the two discuss the likelihood, and potential risks, of Jewel's spending his evenings trysting with a married neighbor (132–33). In a moment, when it seems as though the family's willingness to turn a blind eye to Jewel's behavior results in his coming into some kind of danger, Darl's self-reflection demonstrates a genuine care for his younger brother and sense of regret at his own lack of involvement in the situation.

It was as though, so long as the deceit ran along quiet and monotonous, all of us let ourselves be deceived. But now it was like we had all...flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness...saying, 'Now is the truth. He hasn't come home. Something has happened to him. We let something happen to him. (134)

If his self-involvement and callousness to the feelings and property of others evince Darl's lunacy, reflections like this one proclaim his sanity.

Despite the attitudes against him for the better part of his life, no action is taken against Darl until he sets fire to Gillespie's barn. The complexity of that scene is augmented by the fact that Darl is not revealed as the arsonist until after the account of the fire. While the crime compels the law to get involved and turns most of Darl's family against him, Cash concedes, "I can almost believe he done right in a way" (233). Cash



entertains the possibility that Darl was acting in the good sense to finally bring the family to peace, though he also allows, “nothing excuses setting fire to a man’s barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property” (233). Ted Atkinson suggests that in addition to characterizing Cash’s pragmatism, the man’s wavering attitude toward Darl’s actions supports the contextual analysis of the family’s struggle as a representation of the South’s changing economic status at the dawn of the twentieth century. He writes, “By alternatively affirming and challenging private property as a dominant ordering principle, Cash’s response to the barn burning not only registers socioeconomic anxieties prevalent at the historical moment but also complicates the autonomous claim that the novel’s modernist form aggressively stakes” (Atkinson 24). While Darl’s attack on private property may be inexcusable, can it be deemed irrational?

A careful look at the fire scene (218–222) demonstrates that Darl may have meticulously reasoned out the entire event.

Darl, silent and contemplative character, mirror-eyed onlooker and indefatigable narrator, is never but once actively involved—at least, in his own initiative—during the Bundrens’ funeral trip. He seems to be swept along, against his own will, by an empty ritual whose absurdity and obscenity become so intolerable that he eventually decides to set fire to the barn. (Delville 69)

While he stays beside Jewel for the majority of the experience, Darl does not do so to help Jewel, but rather to prevent Jewel from rescuing the corpse. Jewel leads Darl initially to the casket, but Darl immediately reminds his brother, “Quick...the horses” (219). The fact that he himself does nothing to remove the animals from the barn supports the supposition that he uses the animals to distract Jewel from the casket. Upon freeing

the cow—again Darl makes no move to assist—Jewel turns his attention back to the coffin. At this point Darl takes his first real action since the fire began: “I grasp at him” (221). Having been stopped from going back into the burning heart of the barn by Darl, Jewel rushes through the hole he created to free the cow and runs around to the front door of the barn. Darl rushes after him shouting for the others to, ““Catch him!’ I cry; ‘Stop him!’” (221). Darl’s cries could be a concern for the safety of his brother; however, with the understanding that he could have, in an act of full reason, set fire to the barn, his cries could also indicate a final effort to prevent Jewel from pulling the casket out of the flames. Though neither motive fully supports mental instability, Darl’s actions frame the grounds on which he is institutionalized.

While one may argue over the quality of Darl’s mental state throughout the body of the novel, the man acts definitively insane by the narrative’s resolution. In his final narration, Darl seems to relate events in the third person; however, a more accurate description of perspective would be a removed first-person. He says, for example, “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” (254). His personality split, Darl becomes two characters in this penultimate account. He speaks of himself as another (Darl had), yet identifies himself as a separate being of cognition (I know). Though he sits physically on a train to Jackson, he projects his narrative persona to the wagon in Jefferson, which has, also, “that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have” (254). First-person-Darl’s projection matches the clairvoyance, which caused his sister and younger brother to fear him, as his thoughts, “Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet

interstices, looking out he foams” (254), echo his youngest brother’s thoughts from the previous narration (252).

Meanwhile, Third-person-Darl, back on the train, limits his vocalizations to laughter and repetitive affirmations; however, present as well, First-person-Darl vocally interrogates his other and, by so doing, echoes the voice of yet another family member. Six times in this narration, First-person-Darl asks, in various forms, “Why are you laughing, Darl?” (253–54). Third-person-Darl’s laughter seems unquestionably to support his insanity, and First-person-Darl’s question recalls the statement from Anse much earlier in the novel, “How many times I told him it’s doing such things as that [laughing] that makes folks talk about him, I dont know” (105). Perhaps Darl laughs because he is saner than the world around him. He perceives Addie’s punishment of Anse and the insincerity with which she left the world as a great joke. Anse, after all, does not receive any damages from the fulfillment of this voyage, while each of his children end up somewhat scathed. Darl’s own downfall is his trip to the Jackson asylum, he having been accused by a world that fails to perceive life as clearly as he does.

Despite the fact that the whole Bundren family exists outside the boundaries of universally maintained thought and behavior, Darl ultimately stands out as an extreme example. Perhaps the thing that most sets him apart from his kin is the fact that they can remove themselves from the task at hand and focus instead on their own desires: a new set of teeth, a new graphophone, a new horse, an abortion, or a new train set. “Darl cannot free himself from the world, because his perceptions already entrap him in the test of his own making, his translations of phenomena into his own meaning. His only recourse is to read that text of his existence and perhaps unweave its meaning. Yet, as he

unweaves, his mind begins to unravel” (Petty 34).

Recognizing Darl’s ultimate unraveling, the reader is forced to reflect on moments of seeming lucidity, on the part of Darl, in the novel and reevaluate them. When Darl explains the emptying of himself, for example, a first reading may indicate a common and sound self-evaluation and search for identity; however, on re-evaluation, the same description supports his mental instability. He says, “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 don’t know what I am. I don’t know if I am or not” (80). Darl’s inability to identify his own being, on reflection, demonstrates a lack of sound being. “Darl cannot undergo the self-emptying that precedes sleep for, like the two-year-old when the parents turn off the bedroom light, he is unsure of selfhood” (Adamowski *Meet* 213).

The trail of re-evaluation ultimately leads the reader back to the events, which culminate in his seizure by the authorities. To understand whether or not Darl exhibited sound judgment in his burning of the Gillespie barn, one must turn to Darl’s only verbalization of motive, which actually appears in one of Vardaman’s narrations. On the evening of the fire, but prior to it, Darl leads his youngest brother to the casket and convinces him that their mother’s corpse is praying that God “hide her away from the sight of man...so she can lay down her life” (215). Darl, who *in absentia* acknowledged the moment of his mother’s passing (52), now suggests she has not yet laid down her life. His later action of setting the fire is identified by him, with these words to Vardaman, as a usurpation of the authority and power of God. Darl calls into question the entire quest, a journey motivated by a woman’s dying wishes, and subverts her own vocalized desires

by creating for her new ones, which align with his own will. As John Earl Bassett claims, “Darl is drawn towards depersonalization in the act of comprehending and controlling his world” (130). Whatever sense of reason may be displayed in the methods by which Darl conducts his arson is undone by this assumption of authority; his narcissism supports, rather, that his mental instability, if it is indeed genuine, precedes his incarceration.

Perhaps the greatest factor involving Faulkner’s depiction of mental instability in *As I Lay Dying* lies strictly in the ambiguity of that portrayal. Others of his characters, like Benjy and Tommy, exhibit definite mental impairments; however, Darl often leaves the reader puzzled. Because Darl at times seems cognitively superior to the other characters in this novel, the readers bond with him in ways that they are unable to do with his counterparts in *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*. This bond enables Faulkner to interrogate the human spirit in a powerful way. He establishes an emotional connection between each reader and Darl and uses those connections to force introspection. Readers who have built strong foundations with Darl through the course of the novel, grow dubious when that foundation deteriorates by the novel’s closing.

At its very base this novel investigates the human capacity to accept change. Though each of the Bundrens deal with their family tragedy in unique ways, Darl’s situation serves as a reminder to the reader that certain rules exist regardless of change. Cash may be saying it best when he claims, “I would think what a shame Darl couldn’t be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life, his life” (261). The experiences of Yoknapatawpha often symbolize the postbellum change in the American South, and the Bundrens are a vivid example of such symbolism.

In her work on Faulkner’s use of Addie’s corpse as a fetishized object, Tamara

Slankard suggests that the body represents to the Bundren survivors, and in turn to the readership of the novel, a changing South. “The corpse as fetish object becomes a site of negotiation of loss and a mode of discourse, not across cultures as original anthropological definitions of the fetish would imply, but rather across cultural boundaries of the twentieth century” (Slankard 10). Emblematic of a rapidly changing system of human remains disposal, the Bundrens’ journey also draws socio-economic distinctions which parallel national economic divisions between the industrial North and the agricultural South. The poor, country Bundrens hope to fulfill Addie’s last requests, but they lack both the finances and the capacity to accept charity which could lighten their burden. “While she simultaneously prods Anse and her children into action and into town, Addie’s corpse also becomes the literal burden that her family must bear, making their journey from rural to urban terrain—from Old to New South and into modernity—even more arduous than it otherwise would be” (Slankard 16).

Faulkner seems to use Darl as a warning to his fellow Southerners of the foolishness in resistance to a new set of rules and a new way of life. His message implies that those who focus on serving themselves and their own needs, above out-dated and unnecessary traditions, adapt and survive, while the imprudently idealistic who fight to maintain an archaic identity, will find themselves ultimately without any identity at all. “Insanity is figured here as the inability to recognize the value of commodities,” Slankard writes (25). She goes on to suggest that, “The new Mrs. Bundren’s graphophone symbolizes a modern world from which Darl, unable to participate in a capitalist economy, is excluded” (Slankard 25). After all, the flexible survivors—like Jewel who, “...knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He

cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not” (80)—are the ones who enjoy the satisfaction of ignorant peace.

While Darl’s insanity acts as an example of a new lucidity demonstrated by a paradigm shift in the role of the South, its message universally speaks to anyone touched by traumatic change. We find the Bundrens’ trauma comical at times, horrifying at others, and tragic at still others. We laugh at Anse’s laziness and the opportunity he identifies in his wife’s death for a new set of teeth. We honor Cash’s endurance despite a seemingly cursed life. We respect Jewel’s determination. We pity Dewey Dell’s condition. We excuse Vardaman’s innocence. We identify in Darl, though, something different. Initially it seems a voice of reason—a perspective superior to those around him. We connect with him because we reject those of his peers who reject him; however, we as readers fall when we realize that we have put our own weight on unstable ground. Darl’s mental instability is real, but it is kept ambiguous to us because only through the shattering of trust in him are we able to scrutinize our trust in any institution we have come to believe is stable.

## CONCLUSION

The dire uncertainty of the future is a characteristic common to Southern Gothic fiction. This attribute certainly evidences itself in the three Faulkner novels thus far analyzed; though, the disintegration of the Southern aristocracy is perhaps best expressed by Faulkner through yet another mentally impaired character. *Absalom, Absalom!* tells the story of the Sutpen family, which ultimately falls into ruin. The last remaining heir to the family is a black man named Jim Bond.

...there stood in the hall below a hulking young negro man in clean faded overalls and shirt, his arms dangling, no surprise, no nothing in the saddle-colored and slack-mouthed idiot face. [Quentin Compson] remembered how he thought, ‘The scion, the heir, the apparent (though not obvious)’ (370).

The deterioration of the great Southern family to this one remaining heir is two-fold. Jim is black and, as such, disgraces the family’s Southern legacy. Jim is also mentally impaired. The “idiot” wanders the desolated fields bellowing until his own final days. “There was nothing left now, nothing out there now but that idiot boy to lurk around those ashes and those four gutted chimneys and howl” (376). With Jim Bond, Faulkner demonstrates literally what many of his novels support figuratively: The old way of the South is over; holding on to those traditions futile. Quentin’s college chum summarizes it excellently when he says at the conclusion of *Absalom, Absalom!*, “...in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere” (378). Shreve clearly dictates Faulkner’s warning, one that appears frequently, though not as overtly, throughout the Yoknapatawpha fiction.

This analysis has looked closely at three other instances of that message—



particularly at the way Faulkner utilized mentally impaired characters to help him deliver it. Though Benjy, Tommy, and Darl differ vastly from each other in their characteristics, in their abilities and disabilities, a few common threads unite the three characters and their respective narratives. The unity that their narratives share reinforces Faulkner's overall warning.

One element that all three characters have in common involves the ways in which their peers view and treat them. The thoughts and attitudes of the additional characters in each novel play an important role in determining how the disabilities are used. Benjy's family, for example, views the man-child as an irritant, a constant presence to be dealt with, though one they would rather ignore and often abuse. The community fears him and strives to avoid him, while he himself has difficulty adapting to the changing community around him.

In a similar manner, the other members of the gang at Old Frenchman's often ignore Tommy. His presence results in the need for manual labor and in Lee Goodwin's kindness at taking him in. The rest of the gang continually pushes Tommy to the margins. They fail to include him in serious conversations and often forget about him as a presence at the farmstead. The fact that Temple's victimization overshadows his murder in the novel coincides with the way his peers ignore him. Temple's fear of him as a sexual predator quickly dissolves, as she grows familiar with his impairment; furthermore, she exploits his desire for her in order to use his strength as protection, as short-lived as that may have been.

Both members in and out of Darl's family have a difficult time connecting with him. He is viewed as the "queer" member of a family that is nothing if it is not queer.

Though readers can easily identify in the Bundren family, and in the poorer Yoknapatawpha community, several abnormal qualities, Darl presents an interesting case study. His personal form of “madness” carries a respectable amount of “method” that makes his character difficult to label. Regardless of the validity of his mental illness, though, he is ultimately arrested for burning down the Gillespie barn and is confined to an asylum on the assumption of insanity.

That these characters tend to be ostracized—even bullied—by the people around them comes as no terribly great surprise. Impairments, as qualities that make a person noticeably fall short of normality, tend to repel others, who are confused by, are made uncomfortable by, or are downright afraid of such differences. A more surprising commonality, shared by these characters, is that Faulkner imbues each with supernatural abilities. These gifts may make up for these characters’ deficiencies within the novels; however, they additionally augment the fear that other characters and the readers may have for the each of the three.

Tommy, usually characterized by buffoonery, undergoes an unnatural transformation on the night before he dies. Attributed with cat-like glowing eyes, he becomes almost imperceptible to the other inhabitants of Old Frenchman’s. He takes on an uncharacteristic stealth during the night, as he observes Temple’s sleep and the interactions of the other members of his gang. This transformation does not last, however; he is back to his “normal” self by daybreak.

Those characters closest to Darl, his brother Jewel and sister Dewey Dell, fear in him his inhuman ability to know things. Dewey Dell, who speaks of being able to communicate with Darl wordlessly, despises her brother because he alone knows the

secret of her pregnancy. Likewise, Darl shares knowledge, which he obtains unnaturally, with Jewel. Through Darl, Jewel learns of his mother's death and the truth that Anse is not his father. The fear that both of these siblings have of Darl causes each to work most fervently towards their brother's incarceration.

Though he is without speech and is kept away from the major events of his family, including marriages and funerals. Benjy is able to sense the loss of his family members. Attributed with a keen sense of smell by those around him, the familial losses that Benjy perceives account for changes in his life that are disastrous to him. He responds to these changes with monstrous bellowing.

If their mental impairments alone are not enough to detach these characters from their peers or from the novels' readers, then the fact that they are given these supernatural abilities makes up for it. Through these qualities, Faulkner turns these characters into the monsters of his own brand of Gothic fiction. One may sympathize with Darl, Tommy, or Benjy as one could with Frankenstein's monster; though, any pathetic connections will remain somewhat incomplete. These men are meant, like Jim Bond, to exist as warnings to Faulkner's readers.

The impairments, from which each of these characters suffers, are necessary literal components to their respective stories. In order to fully illustrate the fall of the Southern aristocracy, a people credited with adherence to masculine rules of chivalry and independence, Faulkner needed a male heir to the family to be completely dependent on family and society. In particular Faulkner subjected this character, Benjy, to the authority of his black, adolescent servants. Without Tommy's mental impairment, Temple Drake would have had no basis on which to trust him. Being physically stronger than the other

residents of the manor, Tommy would have repelled Temple, who feared the physical attack of rape, more than any others. It is his lower intelligence, in connection with his physical strength, that draws Temple to him as a protector. The use of Darl's impairment, or lack thereof, is best identified through the words of his older brother Cash: "It aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it" (233). Faulkner uses Darl's commitment to the asylum to highlight the foolishness of the world. In a dead mother's attempt to cast punishment on her husband, Darl's is the only voice that realizes the failure of her retribution: Anse benefits from the journey to the detriment of the rest of them, who loved Addie. The irony of life would not be so clear if Darl were not perceived as queer by the majority.

In addition to their literal uses, the mental impairments of Faulkner's characters function aesthetically in these novels. *As I Lay Dying* relies on binaries, particularly, as demonstrated in the paragraph above, between the individual and society. The question of Darl's impairment ignites the novel with a mood of mystery, which supports Faulkner's comment on the subjectivity of truth much more emphatically than would a clear-cut indicator of Darl's sanity or insanity. The mood of *Sanctuary* also relies heavily on the use of a mentally-impaired character. Temple looks to Tommy to protect her from the other men. She trusts that, though she fears a completely physical attack, Tommy's mental deficiency will keep him from attacking her; nevertheless, Tommy is, in fact, sexually interested in her and promises to be her protector only after she agrees to sleep with him and he perceives her as his own sexual object. The novel's mood of terror is strengthened by the uncertainty of Tommy's actions. *The Sound and the Fury* is less about terror, suspense, and mystery, and more about dissonance and disappointment. The

audience of the novel can perceive, from a distance, Benjy's bizarre reactions to even the most minor changes and can form judgments of him; however, the novel invites introspection and forces its readers to turn those same judgments on themselves and their own resistance to change.

Finally, the mental impairments of Faulkner's characters operate figuratively in his novels. In order to fully illustrate the hopelessness of Temple Drake's situation, Faulkner needed his female protagonist to perceive at least the smallest chance of sanctuary. In this way, Tommy—part ineffectual monster, part ineffectual savior—functions in the same way as the remnants of a fallen bridge at a dead-end ravine in an action film. Temple's devastation is that much greater when one can visualize the collapse of the one chance she had. Also on the subject of collapse, through Benjy's disability Faulkner represents the breakdown of Southern traditions. As an impaired individual, Benjy represents a diversion from the ideal. In him, one can visualize the fall from the Southern ideal. Faulkner uses Benjy to demonstrate that the new South is impaired. It no longer, if it ever did at all, fits the ideal to which so many cling. *As I Lay Dying* can be analyzed as the antithesis of *The Sound and the Fury*.

*As I Lay Dying* has often been read as a sort of white-trash mirror for *The Sound and the Fury*, and there is an appropriate symmetry in the contrast between the ruling-class family whose mother is absent while alive and the lower-class family whose mother maintains a central presence after death (Palmer 129).

While Benjy represents the demise of the Southern aristocratic traditions, Darl may represent the rising influence of the poorer classes, which his world is not yet ready to acknowledge. Perceived to be odd—even by his family and close neighbors—though

seemingly mentally aware, Darl invites the possibility of imminent change, yet he is one of the unfortunate victims rising too early to benefit from that change himself.

Through the use of mentally impaired characters, William Faulkner invites humankind to inspect itself. One is better able to identify oneself when one views one's reflections in others. What one person perceives as an abnormality in another tends to cause anxiety, and Faulkner exploits that element of human nature repeatedly with the impaired citizens of Yoknapatawpha. In processing his fiction, his readers are reminded of the foolishness inherent in clinging to ideals. His message may have been aimed originally at the South and those citizens that stubbornly adhered to the archaic ideal, but it also holds true universally—there is no standard of normality, only an accepted sentiment of the masses. One may comply with it, one may rage against it, but one must be ever ready to adapt according to it.

## NOTES

1. Maria Truchan-Tataryn argues that “unquestioning acceptance of [Benjy] as a successful representation of intellectual disability reveals an underlying ableism in the critical endeavor and an academic acquiescence to dated socio-cultural constructions of disability” (160).
2. Studies of synesthesia report a crossing of sensations, like the ability to hear colors or to taste music.
3. A thorough counter to these arguments can be found in Caroline Garnier’s “Temple Drake’s Rape and the Myth of the Willing Victim.”
4. As recorded in Noel Polk’s Editors’ Note (Faulkner 264).
5. Faulkner frequently uses the word “queer” in characters’ descriptions of Darl. While literary criticism, particularly Queer Theory, ascribes the word to sexual deviance/deviants, Faulkner’s use seems to restrict the word’s meaning to mental abnormality. No doubt, a study on Darl’s sexuality would be fascinating; however, this chapter limits its analysis of Darl, along with the use of the word “queer”, to mental illness.

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## CURRICULUM VITA

Matthew Foxen was born in Waukesha, Wisconsin in 1980. The third of four children of Gregory Foxen and Laurel Foxen, née Schumann, he graduated from Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wisconsin in the spring of 1998. Concurrent to working full-time as a resource counselor and program writer for adults and children with special needs in New Ulm, Minnesota, Matthew pursued a bachelor's of science degree in education, which he received from Martin Luther College in the spring of 2005.

Following his graduation, Matthew accepted a job offer at Chiang Mai International School in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he taught 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and AP English literature and language. In the fall of 2007, he was promoted to head of the humanities department of that school. In 2009, Matthew moved to El Paso, Texas, to teach 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and to serve as principal at Trinity Lutheran School. He began his graduate studies at The University of Texas at El Paso in the fall of 2011. Then, in 2013, he accepted a job as vice-principal and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade humanities teacher at Trinity-St. Luke's Lutheran School in Watertown, Wisconsin.

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