COMING TO TERMS WITH THE BODY:

FAULKNER AND FEMINISM

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner has had the fascinating if dubious fortune of having his depictions of women scrutinized for almost three decades without the benefit of women's studies. From the beginning of Faulkner studies the question of misogyny was an obvious and pressing one. Rarely in great literature does one find women so insistently victimized and stereotyped as in Faulkner's fiction. From the early 1940s to the late 1960s most critics reacting to Faulkner's treatments of women were indignant: "had Faulkner dared treat in such terms any racial minority, his books would have been banned in every enlightened school in the country" (Fiedler 309). Faulkner's reputation for misogyny was propogated primarily by male critics, however.[1] Interestingly, when women began addressing Faulkner's work the response was generally positive.[2] In "Faulkner and (Southern) Women," Linda Wagner points out Faulkner's "unrelieved admiration" for women and declares him a feminist because of his celebration and immortalization of the "infinite variety of women" (128,146). Faith Pullin says that Faulkner wished to incorporate into his work "new ways

of perceiving women" and that he "emphasizes the misogyny of southern society in order to criticize it" (65,67). In "Faulkner's Women," Ilse Dusoir Lind praises Faulkner's "inclusion of the biological," saying that his female characters are more developed because they are given a sexuality, something writers often refuse to do (103). Lind provides information about Faulkner's research and examples of the accuracy of his biological details. She cites Faulkner's characterization of Joanna Burden, explaining that Faulkner knew from his study that sexual desire in women reaches a climax just before menopause. Lind commends Faulkner for being "the only major American fiction writer . . . who incorporates into his depiction of women the function of the organs of reproduction" (92).

Though observations made since the 1970s concerning Faulkner's depiction of women have been quite positive, these studies do not cite feminist criticism to back up the enthusiasm. This neglect in Faulkner scholarship could be the cause of some questionable and even offensive criticism concerning Faulkner's women.[3] Some critics who praise Faulkner's depictions of women use latently misogynistic reasoning. Cleanth Brooks comes to the conclusion that "Faulkner portrays women with great skill" and claims that Faulkner regards "his women characters with admiration and/or compassion" (80). The means by which Brooks arrives at this theory are questionable,

however. He says that Faulkner is "fascinated by women, good and bad" (81), but what could Brooks mean by these distinctions? What gives Brooks (or Faulkner, for that matter) the power to decide who is a "good" woman and who is a "bad" woman? Apparently, if a woman follows natural, but not wanton, instincts she is good. Brooks pronounces Lena Grove good because she is "not at all the sexual temptress using lures and wiles" (82); her sexuality is "renewing and sustaining."

Joanna Burden, on the other hand, is an example of "the feminine principle . . . badly distorted" (88). To Brooks, Faulkner's "feminine principle" is a life-sustaining type of wisdom (91), such as the sexuality of Lena Grove. Brooks believes Faulkner values this "feminine principle" because it is needed as a "counterforce to [men's] often reckless energies, which require being checked and channeled into fruitful enterprises" (91). (Those naughty boys!) Joanna Burden's "feminine principle" is warped because she is "masculinized" (88), "thoroughly repressed" (89), and "love-starved" (90)--"indeed, it is no wonder that Joe eventually murders Joanna" (89). By suggesting that Joe's act of murder is the result of those "reckless energies" that might have been checked by a greater woman--though he kindly concedes that Joanna assumes her role "through no fault of her own" (91) and that perhaps no one could have dealt with Joe Christmas--Brooks

reveals his own misogyny. His attention to women's sexuality is for the purpose of moral judgment, and since he does not also judge men by their sexual actions, his approach is insidiously sexist, though he maintains that Faulkner's portrayals are not.

Sally Page, like Cleanth Brooks, praises Faulkner's portrayals of women for similarly questionable reasons. Page believes that Faulkner depicts women in terms of normal sexuality and perverse sexuality. Like Brooks, she imposes her own traditional and oppressive values on Faulkner's work. She glorifies Faulkner's depictions of Lena Grove and Eula Varner as women who are "creative and sustaining" and calls Lena Grove "Faulkner's most fascinating portrayal of woman fulfilling her natural destiny" (139-40). She sees Faulkner's rendering of Lena as "wholly favorable" but she bases this praise on her insistence that there are women who are natural (pregnant) and therefore good, and women who are perverse (spinsters, infertile nymphomaniacs, "masculine" women) and therefore agents of death and decadence. Page projects onto Faulkner the belief that "sexuality naturally fulfilled" is the "source of the survival of mankind," and results in new life, and "tranquility and moral order." On the other hand, "sexual perversity is equal to the perversion of life" (134). In other words, Faulkner is not a misogynist because he is only vicious to nasty and infertile women; to recall Cleanth

Brooks, "it is no wonder that Joe eventually murders Joanna" (89).

Perhaps in response to these atrocities committed against Faulkner and women, Ilse Dusoir Lind called for the merging of Faulkner studies and women's studies at the Twelfth Annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference on Faulkner and Women.[4] Lind proposed that "women's studies and Faulkner studies can be brought into meaningful relationship" (22) and that "insights provided by . . . feminist studies" have a "surprising . . . capacity to correct . . . unresolved problems in the Faulkner field" (38-39). To this date no studies have significantly contributed to this goal.[5] Many critics, it seems, are still responding to Faulkner through their own sexist vision or sexist guilt. Noel Polk is uneasy about relieving Faulkner of the label misogynist because Faulkner's images of women are "too upsetting." Polk finds "something disturbing about the comprehensiveness with which women in [Faulkner's] work are associated with blood and excrement and filth and death" (203). These associations are only "upsetting" if the reader finds them so; they are not inherently misogynistic.

Judith Bryant Wittenberg says that "misogynistic assessments" of Faulkner reveal the "persistence of such visions in the critics' own psyches" (326).[6] In her "feminist consideration" of Faulkner's depiction of women, Wittenberg comes to the conclusion that Faulkner is

"neither pro- nor anti-female" (327) and that men and women are equally victimized in Faulkner's novels: "male words may be the last words, and their viewpoints the most prevalent in the Faulknerian universe, circumscribing the women and limiting their options, but as the fiction makes clear at every level, men and women alike are poor frail victims of being alive" (336). While Wittenberg's argument is enlightening and provides a fine discussion of the misogyny debate in Faulkner studies, it, too, neglects citing any feminist texts. Doing so might have elicited a different conclusion, that "male words" are not the "last words" because female bodies in Faulkner's fiction speak with more strength and permanence than any of Faulkner's men.

Many critics focus on Faulkner's use of the female body.[7] These critics' most frequent observations concern the fears men in Faulkner's novels have of female biological potency. However, the majority of scholarship concerning "Faulkner's women" is not feminist and is often even anti-feminist. A feminist reading of Faulkner's work reveals subtle but crucial similarities between feminist criticism and Faulkner's portrayals of women. While Faulkner's work does not encompass the full reality of women's lives, it is feminist in its attempt to challenge male systems of sexuality and language. Chapter two explores the relationship between Faulkner's work and feminist criticism, while chapters

three and four provide readings of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying that issue from this connection. These novels, in particular, contain characterizations that suggest a dichotomy between silence and talking, and present man's attempt to diminish the power of the female body.

CHAPTER II

THE FEMALE BODY IN FAULKNER AND FEMINIST CRITICISM

Many feminists resent what they see as biological reductionist assumptions about women because they believe that male domination is founded upon the exploitation of women's natural biological disadvantages. Shulamith Firestone, for example, believes that female reproduction is the source of male domination and goes as far as suggesting artificial reproduction as a possible solution to sexism (227-31). Likewise, Susan Lees points out that while other social problems can be solved through social reform, sexism is linked to biology and can only be resolved if a society makes changes in its reproductive system. Simone de Beauvoir also attributes the oppression of women to biology. While Firestone and Lees blame biology itself, Beauvoir focuses on the advantage men have taken of women's biological incapacitation (77-78). While biological factors are not a choice for women, men do deliberately subjugate the physically disadvantaged. Besides being a victim of male strength, women's bodies have taken the brunt of male fear and judgment. Religious myths play a part in man's aversion

to women; the story of the Fall puts women's sexuality in eternal condemnation (167). The "mysterious" and uncontrollable nature of menstruation has made men lash out in anger at the "evil powers" of women (149). Even in the area of politics, patriarchal ideology is linked to the female body. In Sexual Politics, Kate Millett examines male dominance and penetration in heterosexual intercourse as a symbol of sexism and male political power. In one way or another, many feminists blame biology for the oppression of women and would be particularly repulsed by Faulkner's depictions of women as well as by critical theory that unquestioningly elevates the fecundity of Faulkner's female characters, such as Karl Zink's notion of "profoundly Woman: pregnant" (143).

Additionally, many feminists feel that women have been incarcerated in the corporal not only because of the burden of reproduction but because of the way women have been labeled and judged by their sexuality. Here I believe feminists might take more offence at Faulkner critics than at Faulkner himself. The sexualities of Caddy and Addie, for example, are far more liberated than the sexual ideologies of Brooks or Page.

While feminists such as Beauvoir and Firestone urge women to rise above their physicality and fight for the right to function on a primarily intellectual level, Adrienne Rich and Helene Cixous point out that the fault

is not with the body itself but with the way men have made women feel about themselves. In Of Woman Born, Rich praises the female body and all its functions and instincts. She, too, sees motherhood as a form of oppression, but only because patriarchal society has made it that. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous shows that men have made women hate themselves, individually, and collectively. She refers to this as a kind of "antinarcissism" or "antilove." Women must be able to love themselves in order to be whole and free; Cixous believes this love must begin with the body.

Cixous points out that many of the ways women have been pushed to hate themselves are linked to judgments about what they do with their bodies. Women are made to feel guilty "for being too frigid, for being 'too hot' . . . for being too motherly and not enough . . . for nursing and for not nursing" (880). Everything women do with their bodies is judged by men. Caddy Compson is a prime example. Linda Wagner points out that "Caddy is the victim of a social morality . . . that considers the state of one's hymen the sole index to value" ("Faulkner" 134). It is easy for critics to assume that Faulkner judges women in this way. The outcome of The Sound and the Fury, however, proves that the enforcers of this type of social morality are the real losers. Wagner maintains that the Compson family is damned because "it condemns its one caring child" (134). Careful reading

of Faulkner's novels reveals that judgments against women consistently turn back on those who issue them. Traditional readers, however, may cling to the familiar judgments without recognizing Faulkner's revision of them. Faulkner questions the supremacy of the male world. His male characters dominate women's bodies in an attempt to alleviate their fear of losing power and security.

Traditionally, the images in literature of female bodies have belittled women and have put women at the mercy of their anatomy.[8] Beauvoir and Firestone are unable to make peace with the body because of its role in male domination, but later feminists, particularly Cixous, Rich, Irigaray, Ostriker, and Gubar, praise the female body as an image of creativity and strength.[9] At one time, a woman had no artistic outlet other than her body. Now, contemporary feminists are proposing female biology as a major image of women's art.[10] Helene Cixous says, "your body must be heard" (880), and ten years later Alicia Ostriker observes that they are being heard; women are seeing their bodies as an asset rather than a liability and are "writing about their bodies with decreasing embarassment and increasing enthusiasm." They are writing about "their menstrual periods . . . about giving birth, giving suck, growing old" (92). By using vivid biological images, women writers may counter the problems they have with patriarchal language. In "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children" Adrienne

Rich says, "this is the oppressor's language/ yet I need it to talk to you" (The Fact of a Doorframe 117). Luce Irigaray voices a similar concern, that the only language women have is the language of men--the speech that "interrupts our blood flow . . . their words, the gag upon our lips" (74-75). Feminine carnality, however, is a source of expression that men can not really direct.

This is a frustration depicted in Faulkner's novels as the male characters respond to the female characters. Faulkner portrays this struggle by using biological images and events also found in feminist writing. Like the contemporary feminist, Faulkner portrays women "giving suck" and "growing old." He presents women who menstruate and give birth; who lactate and experience menopause. He portrays feminine sexuality at its most potent: "You can smell it ten feet away!" (The Hamlet 99). Faulkner's graphic depictions of the female body work to expose the ineffectiveness, if not oppression, of patriarchal language. His male characters mourn language's loss of power and respond to women with hatred and disgust because they blame intellectual despair on the strength of the female body. Faulkner's male characters are helpless and afraid; Faulkner's depictions of women embody this fear.

Susan Gubar points out that "the female body has been feared for its power to articulate itself" (246). Images of women in literature consistently reflect this

fear; men in Faulkner's novels particularly fear menstrual blood.[11] In both Light in August and The Sound and the Fury, female blood is described with repulsion. Joe Christmas is told that women are "victims of periodical filth" (204), and Quentin Compson's father tells him that women are a "delicate equilibrium of periodical filth" (159). Mimi Gladstein maintains that men are repulsed but are also awed by menstrual blood because it represents both decay and fertility. She quotes Lederer's The Fear of Women to demonstrate that men are repulsed by women because of their excessive physicality; women have "too many secretions" (44).[12]

David Williams also points out a connection between menstruation and powers of creativity and destruction and sees woman's blood as the "emblem and essence of her awesome domination in the human world" (108). In Faulkner's novels, menstrual blood is associated with death more often than life. Mr. Compson refers to menstrual blood as "liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating" (160). In Light in August menstruation is referred to as "something liquid, deathcolored, and foul" (209), the thought of which causes Joe to vomit. When Joe initially learns about menstruation, he reacts by killing a sheep and putting his hands in its blood (204).

While Faulkner's male characters are obsessed with the destructive element of menstrual blood, many

contemporary feminists consider it a metaphor of creativity. Susan Gubar refers to blood as "one of the primary and most resonant metaphors provided by the female body" (248), and says "we must come to terms with the fact of blood before we can understand the nature of female art" (253). Interestingly, Gubar uses the phrase "come to terms" in reference to a female bodily function. The bodily functions of Faulkner's female characters direct the events in many of his novels and their bodies have the power to create and communicate with a kind of speech. In Faulkner's world, the language of the male mind is undercut by the language of the female body and "for many feminists, the female body has become a figure for literalness and truth" (Michie 149). Faulkner's male characters often react to this turn of events by loathing women's bodies, but readers must not assume that this response represents Faulkner's feelings about women. What Faulkner's depictions of women do reveal is his attitude toward language and the intellect and his faith in the power of the body.

To say that Faulkner's portrayals of women are misogynistic would be to deny contemporary feminists' celebration of woman's carnality. The conclusion that Faulkner's portrayals of women label them as bitches and whores and cows exposes the sexism of the critic. These labels are not Faulkner's but are inferred by readers (and characters) who believe the female body

is repulsive and who are judgmental and antagonistic towards women. This is not to say that Faulkner himself is not repulsed by women's bodies. It is unlikely that he would possess the consciousness of a contemporary feminist. It is more likely that his depictions of both women and men are related to his awareness of an ailment common to western culture--"somatophobia" (fear of the body).

Elizabeth Spelman attributes fear of the body to the Platonic mind/body distinction. She explains that since the body has been considered animalistic and vulgar, men have been preoccupied with trying to free the mind and soul from the body. Understanding of knowledge, beauty, and love can not be attained until man is freed from his body. According to Spelman, Plato believes women are too involved with the physical to ever transcend it. To Plato, "the body is seen as the source of all the undesirable traits a human being could have, and women's lives are spent manifesting those traits" (118).

Spelman explains that many feminists have fallen prey to "somatophobia" and have furthered the belief that the mind is superior to the body. She accuses Beauvoir and Firestone, in particular, of promoting the same values that men have been expressing in their domination over women. She believes that their idea of women's liberation is actually only a liberation from the body (124). She credits Adrienne Rich with having

initiated the awareness that women need not distance themselves from their bodies.

The assumption that the mind is more valuable than the body is disproved again and again in Faulkner's work. The question of Faulkner's personal view of women is unanswerable and critics who focus on this are neglecting true analysis of the world in which Faulkner's characters live. It is not a world in which men are superior to women, or a world in which women are all good or all evil, but a world in which the ideal of transcendence has failed. The characters who display the greatest strength in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying are those who are the most physical--Caddy and Addie. Quentin and Darl, on the other hand, two of Faulkner's most intellectual characters, signify modern humanity's despair at the powerlessness of reason. The dichotomy is portrayed not so much by whether these characters are women or men, but by each one's affinity with or distance from articulation and language. Examinations of Caddy and Addie confirm that Faulkner's female characters are indestructible not in spite of their silence but because of it. Their bodies' power speaks what Quentin's and Darl's intellects can not begin to fathom.

CHAPTER III

CADDY AND QUENTIN

Faulkner's female characters are inarticulate. In a civilization that glorifies language as the gift that separates humans from animals, the lack of intellectual discourse is most often seen as a handicap. Many of Faulkner's novels, particularly The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, do reinforce the convention of woman as a speechless, sexual mother-earth and man as an articulate, ascendent intellectual being.[13] A lofty lexicon is associated with superiority and power, and men use words to exert this power over women.

Even when a Faulknerian women has something to say, as does Rosa Coldfield in Absalom, Absalom!, she needs the power of a man to help her with the telling. Miss Coldfield calls for Quentin Compson "because she wants it told" and "because she will need someone to go with her--a man" (11-12). In Absalom, Absalom! both Quentin and Rosa are storytellers, Quentin because he is man and Rosa because she is a "ghost."[14] Mr. Compson informs Quentin that men have a gentlemanly obligation to listen to women who are ghosts because it was the War (male aggression) that killed the ladies (12). Perhaps because

it is the gentlemanly thing to do, Faulkner allows Addie Bundren to speak after her death. Generally, however, Faulkner's female characters remain central, yet speechless, and express themselves primarily through their bodies.[15] The verbal inarticulation of Faulkner's female characters is countered by the expressiveness of their bodies. While men in Faulkner's novels tell, the women show with their bodies. Showing and telling are terms associated with writing (young writers are instructed to show, not tell) and with sexuality. Pregnancy is public when a women is "showing." Childbirth is imminent with the "show of blood." To retain sexual rights to a woman, a man may threaten to "tell."

Men intimidate women with words because a woman's ability to show with her body is frightening to men. Women's bodies diffuse the rules of male linguistic games and disturb the order of the male universe. Characters such as Quentin and Darl are dashed to bits by the very discourse that once elevated them. In Faulkner's world, people who are dependent on language and intellect, usually men, are panicking at the possibility that their intellect may be inferior to bodily wisdom and expression. Silent, central females such as Caddy and Addie are characterized by their capability for showing, while contrasting male characters are rendered helpless for telling. The psychological devastation of Quentin and Darl proves the futility of attempting to intellectually

articulate the reality women show naturally. The more female bodies bleed and swell and pulsate, the more afraid men become. The more afraid men become, the more desperately they turn to intellect and talk. The more fearfully men grope for words, the more absurd their world becomes. There are no more poignant depictions of these men than Faulkner's Quentin and Darl. They are the most intellectual and articulate characters in The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying, but the women whom their lives center around, Caddy and Addie, show more knowledge than these men could ever tell. Addie shows with blood, milk, and with earthly decay. Caddy shows with earth, wetness, blood, and pregnancy. Rather than limit women to carnal beings, however, Faulkner's characterizations uplift the primal power to which contemporary feminists allude.

This is by no means equivalent to biological reductionism; Faulkner's attention to female bodies is primarily an extension of his expose of the male-dominant, mind-over-body world in which his characters live. Faulkner's male characters bully women out of valid fear, for their world is turning upside down. Those who have the strength of their bodies will retain that power even after death. Those whose lives depend on the intellect, however, find themselves at the mercy of words and powerless over their mortality. These characters, primarily Quentin and Darl, are mewling

and pitiable. Caddy and Addie, however, are not only strong and wise but are motivating forces behind the progression of The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying.[16]

Caddy's body is responsible for almost every event and feeling in The Sound and the Fury.[17] Linda Wagner suggests that Caddy "gives us the plot of the novel in nine words: 'you've got your Caddy. Haven't you got your Caddy'" ("Language" 52). The characters in The Sound and the Fury long for Caddy because they desire the literal wisdom of her body. Benjy has Caddy because he is not capable of a reasoned rejection of her body. He accepts her activity at the branch, saying simply, "She was wet" (19). The words Wagner quotes are spoken to Benjy but can be taken ironically in reference to Quentin. Quentin is torn between having Caddy and not having her. Caddy's muddy wet sexuality is unbearable for Quentin, yet he claims he has committed incest with her. While Benjy and Caddy are physically affectionate, Quentin touches Caddy with desperation and violence. He slaps her when she takes her dress off at the creek and later slaps her for "letting it be some darn town squirt" (166). When Quentin suggests double suicide to Caddy he is simultaneously "crying against her damp blouse" and holding "the point of the knife at her throat" (189). Quentin's drastically ambivalent feelings about Caddy's body lead him to suicide, which is foreshadowed

by his pressing his face as close to the earth as possible so he "wouldnt have to breathe hard and smell it" (194).

Women in Faulkner's novels are unignorably smelly. Caddy's scent (trees) evokes Benjy's fond remembrance of her; her odor (honeysuckle) triggers Quentin's revulsion. Caddy's physicality gives the least intellectual person in the novel a delightful vision of the world: "Caddy smelled like trees in the rain" and "was all wet and muddy behind" (21). To Benjy, Caddy's body is a source of comfort and love as long as it remains natural. He cries when Caddy sprays herself with perfume, but he is perfectly happy when Caddy is wet and muddy. Quentin, on the other hand, is disgusted with Caddy's affinity for creeks and later yells at her, "get out of that water are you crazy" (187). Rain, too, disturbs Quentin--"I wish it wouldn't rain . . . You cant do anything" (81). What really bothers Quentin is that he can't do anything <u>about</u> it. He is dependent upon his intellect, which is no match for the power of nature or Caddy's body. He is sickened by nature, particularly smells and wetness, which he blends together saying, "the honeysuckle drizzled and drizzled" (192), and describing it as "damp waves" (192) that "got into my breathing" (188). When he runs to the branch he can "see the water the colour of grey honeysuckle" (194). When Quentin confronts Caddy about her sexual activity, he is horrified to watch her sitting in the branch:

"water flowing about her hips . . . her skirt . . . flopped along her flanks . . . heavy ripples going nowhere renewed themselves of their own movement" (186). Quentin rejects the fertility of the water that "suck[s] and gurgle[s]" (187). His intellect leads him to choose instead, since he "cant do anything," the destructive aspect of water.

Quentin's drowning is the culmination of the despair he feels each time his reason is unable to "do anything." When he discovers that Caddy is pregnant, he demands verbal explanations from her.[18] But Caddy "refuses to speak at all when it is possible to communicate without words" (Watkins 187). She will not tell her feelings for her lover as Quentin demands; instead, "she moved my hand up against her throat her heart was hammering there . . . her blood pounded against my hand" (The Sound and the Fury 188). Quentin has an obsessive horror with sexual bleeding as well as with wetness; he is repulsed by his father's explanation of menstruation and is morbidly fascinated with castration. When he is questioning Caddy about her sexual activity, he remembers a man who "went into the woods and did it with a razor" (143). He seems to fear that Caddy's pounding wet voice will release his own: "Oh her blood or my blood Oh" (168). In Quentin's mind, castration is a reasonable response to the overwhelming power of nature, just as death is the logical alternative when the core of his

strength, his intellect, becomes overpowered by carnality. Death is the only word that can hold any truth for Quentin, and he looks forward to "the peacefullest words . . . Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum" (216).

Quentin's death is his way of making at least one word true. He has had to deal with the emptiness of words all his life. When he tells his father he has committed incest, his father does not believe him and points out, "It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I [Quentin] said That's just words" (144). It is the nature in Caddy that makes her strong and that makes Quentin aware of the impotence of words. Though he has not had sex with his sister (or maybe <u>because</u> he has not), he wants to control her sexuality with his words. He repeatedly asks her about her lovers and her pregnancy, demanding that she articulate her carnality because the pure physicality is too true for him to bear. "Do you think that if I say it it wont be" (151), Caddy asks. While feeling the beating of Caddy's blood in her throat, Quentin bullies her into an admission of guilt: "say his name . . . say it again . . . say it again" (203). Likewise, Darl, in <u>As I Lay Dying</u>, would control his sister's sexuality with his words--"why won't you say it" and Dewey Dell replies "Are you going to tell?" (39).

Because the men in these women's lives have realized they are trapped in the world of words, they force the women to feel the same powerlessness.[19] Caddy and Dewey

Dell can not or will not translate their realities into speech and are aware only of the pain their carnality has caused them and not of the power of their bodies. They become desperate. "I've got to marry somebody," Caddy reckons (The Sound and the Fury 140). Dewey Dell "don't even blink her eyes. 'I got to do something,' she says" (As I Lay Dying 236). With perhaps the same attitude, her mother Addie states, "And so I took Anse" (162).

These women use words only for things which are, to them, some of the least meaningful or least real parts of their lives. In Light in August Mrs. Beard tells Byron Bunch that "women dont mean anything when they talk. It's menfolks that take talking serious" (397). "Menfolks" must "take talking serious" because it is all they have.[20] In Faulkner's novels, the men have relinquished their bodies for their minds.[21] Language is all they have with which to protect themselves and is the only medium they have with which to seek truth. The women, on the other hand, are more inclined to seek life than truth and use words only as a last resort. Addie and Rosa (the "ghost lady") use words when their lives are taken away from them. Caddy, Addie, and Dewey Dell use words when they feel forced to take part in the male world, such as when they must get married. As Joe Christmas says of women in Light in August, "when they finally come to surrender completely, it's going

to be in words" (227). Addie Bundren, however, does not surrender completely even after her death.

CHAPTER IV

ADDIE AND DARL

Addie shows her reality, that "living is terrible," with even more bodily force than Caddy. The blood of the fish, the blood of the children, and Addie's own blood signify her power.[22] Addie whips the children she teaches, making their blood run with hers, so they will be "aware" of her. Her own children are at her mercy; she shows with her milk that she could neglect or sustain the life that is dependent on her. Even in death her body shows the power of that "voiceless speech" (167). Just as Caddy's earthliness is the catalyst for her brother's suicide and the destruction of her family, Addie's corpse is responsible for setting a motionless family on an earth-bound journey that leads one brother to an insane asylum.

As the most articulate member of the Bundren family, Darl has spent most of his life sheltered by words. But language is too small for Darl; Cora sees him as having a "heart too full for words" (24). His madness comes from his dependence on a medium which he knows channels deceit. People think they want to know the truth, but unwittingly, they deceive themselves. Even

with the best of intentions, to want to articulate truth is to want to destroy truth. Darl realizes this, but the only power-source available to him is language which is backed by nothingness and untruth, like the "fine dead sound" of Harvard for Quentin.

Just as the Compsons depend on Quentin's intellect to preserve the dignity of the family, Darl is burdened by others' dependence on his ability to speak. Near the beginning of As I Lay Dying, Darl is the family member who is responsible for informing everyone that Addie "is going to die" (26), and finally, that "Addie Bundren is dead" (51).

Dewey Dell responds to her mother's death by feeding everyone (at her father's command) (49-50). Vardaman blends his mother's death with the cleaning of a fish and decides his "mother is a fish" (79). Cash makes a list of the thirteen reasons for making the coffin "on the bevel" (77). It is Darl who must synthesize events and try to make sense of his mother's death. He speculates about what is, and what is not; he arranges and rearranges words in order to find the ones that will encapsulate the essence of what has occurred. "I dont know if I am or not" (76), he says, and then makes associations from sleep to rain to wind to the wagon: "And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not . . . when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be.

And then I must be . . . I am is" (76).[23]

At first, language is a source of comfort for Darl because through language he is able to make some sense of things for himself and for others. But the burden of being Faulkner's chief narrator and the synthesizer of all the traumatic events in As I Lay Dying becomes too much for Darl. In spite of his extensive vocabulary, words fail him increasingly as the novel progresses. He is a man capable of describing the dark current as "dimpled monstrously into fading swirls . . . silent, impermanent and profoundly significant" (134), yet this is around the time when he begins to refer to himself in third-person--"Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror" (135). By the time he is committed, he frequently refers to himself in third-person and his eloquence is reduced to laughter. He seems to be dragged through events by others' despair and to become a scapegoat for others' grief, as when he and Jewel are about to drop the coffin: "It begins to rush away from me and slip down the air like a sled upon invisible snow . . . 'Wait, Jewel' I say. But he will not wait . . . and looks back at me, his face suffused with fury and despair. 'Goddamn you. Goddamn you'" (92-93).

As Darl's sense of linguistic control slips away from him, he turns awkwardly toward the physical. He apparently sets fire to a barn and afterward goes to

Addie's coffin and lies on top of it, and cries (214-15). The next day he is committed to an insane asylum. At this point he sits on the ground and laughter consumes his speech. Cash tells Darl it will be better for him and Darl replies, "Better," but, Cash observes, "he couldn't hardly say it for laughing" (228). Darl can hardly say anything for laughing because he recognizes the non-sense of words. He is still searching for answers--"'Why do you laugh?' I said. 'Is it because you hate the sound of laughing?'" (243)--but words are an enemy now instead of an ally. Words have put him "in a cage in Jackson where . . . he foams. 'Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes'" (244).

Darl leaves with a word because he came to Addie by a word. Addie asked Anse to promise to take her to be buried with her family "when Darl was born" in order to take revenge on Anse for the word he gave her when he gave her Darl. Darl was conceived by means of something "hidden within a word" that struck Addie in the back (164). Darl has been burdened with the word ever since his birth and his journey to Jackson depicts his final conflicts with this burden. In contrast, Anse is the least changed by this journey because by fulfilling his promise he "keeps" his "word" (109).

Darl's despair, like Quentin's, is his dependence on language and intellect. They both share an inability to take comfort in the body, symbolized by a longing

for a mother-figure. Darl says, "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother" (89), and Quentin cries in despair, "if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother" (The Sound and the Fury 213-14). Quentin and Darl are tortured by the false truth of the intellect, and long for the sanity and truth of the feminine--for bodies that have felt real feelings, not words, but the feelings that make words unnecessary.

Addie explains that "words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at." Motherhood, for example, "was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (163). Addie knows that words are "dead" and that she has the advantage of her body. Addie's knowledge is purely physical; she understands "the wild blood boiling along the earth" (167), "the milk, warm and calm," and "cleaning up the house afterward" (168). After marriage and childbearing, Addie says, "I learned that words are no good . . . I had been used to words for a long time" (163-64). Addie believes that only something as brutally physical as beating the schoolchildren can make people "as one stream." Even sex is not physical enough, as there is a word for that, too. Here Addie learns that "language is totally inadequate for expression of truth and that its main purpose is to deceive" (Faulkner's As I Lay Dying 135). In his discussion of the "lure" of language,

Bleikasten suggests that Addie progresses from bitterness to rage as she realizes she is trapped by language in spite of her awareness of its emptiness. Addie's anger is first directed at Anse--"it was as though he had tricked me"--but she ultimately realizes that she has been "tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too" (As I Lay Dying 164).

This is the trap that is sprung by both Darl and Quentin; "men think they use language for their own purpose, but in fact it is language that uses them" (Bleikasten 135). The words that "go straight up in a thin line" (As I Lay Dying 165) diffuse into chaos; God's vertical creations build from speech a Tower of Babel, and man's grandest attempt to seek truth--language--signifies nothing.[24]

Faulkner mocks the idea of intellectual transcendence with Anse's discussion of the road, which is horizontal and earthly, in opposition to man or a tree, which points upward but must "stay put." A connection between the road and woman is obvious because Addie is horizontal throughout As I Lay Dying. Anse's verticality is pointedly immobile. The horizontal mobility that disturbs Anse's world is "like a snake," suggesting that the horizontal, earthly strength of woman is evil. Man, on the other hand, like God, "stands to reason" (34-35).[25] By making Anse an extremely dense character, Faulkner suggests that neither spiritual nor intellectual

transcendence is possible for humanity. The only possible salvation is the realization that the body is just as important as, if not more important than, the intellect. This is a reversal of the Platonic ideology discussed by Spelman and mentioned also by Ostriker--"civilization means vertical mobility: one transcends the body to achieve anything of spiritual or public worth" (92-93). In Faulkner's world, however, the mind-over-body dichotomy is flipped upside down. Those who attempt to transcend the body are endlessly hurt and deceived.

Some of the most compelling images in Faulkner's work are of men who beg for an end to the deception of articulation or for the pain of language to cease. Benjy howls, Popeye whimpers, and Darl laughs. In Absalom, Absalom! Quentin Compson pleads, "Am I going to have to hear it all again" (277). Communication through the body is equally painful and difficult for women, but at least they have the comfort of knowing that their bodies, unlike words, cannot lie.[26]

Though Addie's proclamations against words are in the form of words, her true strength is not dependent on language. Addie does not restrain her body's aggression or sexuality. Her body, like female blood, is an example of "awesome domination." Addie's power is woven into the earth and exhibits the forces of existence and sustenance as well as destruction. She beats the schoolchildren as readily as she suckles her

own children, Anse, too--"it didn't matter" (164). To say that women have "too many secretions" in reference to Addie is a grave understatement. Even after death, Addie's body "talks in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling" (202). Though Addie's decay began long before her death, when spring brought her the smell "of damp and rotting leaves and new earth" (161), her rotting corpse demands more from her family than her living, speaking body did. Her family is forced to act and challenged to accept living if they can first come to terms with decay, but, "wouldn't you rather have bananas?" (240). Like Vardaman, the male world cries, "My mother does not smell like that" (187), and fails to understand what women are not saying, the "notlanguage" (Absalom, Absalom! 9) of ghosts. Addie's "voiceless speech" indicts words from the grave, appropriately, since she says words are dead. As she decays, her body continues to speak. "I put my ear close and I can hear her. Only I cant tell what she is saying. 'What is she saying, Darl?' I say. 'Who is she talking to?' . . . 'Listen,' Darl says . . . 'Listen'" (204-05).

Feminine "voiceless speech" is contrasted in Faulkner's novels with the "bleak and bloodless logic" (Light in August 266) of patriarchal discourse. The difficulty contemporary feminists have with this discourse is dramatized in Faulkner's fiction. Faulkner's characters live in a new world that must seek an old

language, "a tongue unknown to man" (441). This is the mutual challenge contemporary feminists and William Faulkner present to a patriarchal society: people must seek sounds "for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words" (As I Lay Dying 166).

NOTES

[1] These include Guerard, Fiedler, Geismar, Howe, and Yorks.

[2] An exception is Douglas.

[3] I use the phrase "Faulkner's women" deliberately to demonstrate the chauvinistic manner in which his characterizations of women have been studied. Through 1980, the titles of most books and articles dealing with the women in Faulkner's novels began with this phrase; since 1980, in light of feminist consciousness and with the awareness that Faulkner does not own these women, most scholars avoid this phrase. The only post 1980 article I have come across that retains the use of this phrase is by Cleanth Brooks.

[4] The resulting book, Faulkner and Women, was published the following year (1986, Fowler and Abadie, eds.) and is now the standard work to consult in this area.

[5] Lind's own article is obscure and brief; Donaldson proposes "subverting history" in a reading of Absalom, Absalom! and even cites feminist texts, but her approach is actually a structuralist one; Clarke's article on gender and language focuses on Faulkner's anxieties and makes only brief references to feminist criticism. In

a work that acknowledges and yet moves away from feminist criticism, Gwin creates a deconstructive reading of Faulkner's female characters, arguing that they act and speak in the realm of Derridian "différance" (25). While these discussions are all well-written and provocative, the anticipated feminist perspective is minimal.

[6] At the 1985 conference on Faulkner and Women, Duvall addressed this issue as well.

[7] Lind in "Faulkner's Women," also, Fowler, Frazer, Williams, Page, Gladstein, and Mortimer.

[8] See Fetterley, Rogers, and Oates.

[9] See also Michie and Demetrakopoulus.

[10] For a discussion of art and the body in Faulkner particularly, see Johnson.

[11] Faulkner's work is noted in Delaney's The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation. For a thorough discussion of Faulkner's work and menstruation see Frazer. For a related discussion see Urgo.

[12] Gladstein's article discusses women and their connection to nature in Faulkner's novels.

[13] There are several very good starting places for the study of these two novels. For overviews of Faulkner's novels see Millgate, Howe, Vickery, Wadlington, and Bleikasten's The Ink of Melancholy. For general collections of essays see Brodhead, Bloom's William Faulkner, Wagner's William Faulkner, Carey, and Kinney. For collections of essays on As I Lay Dying see Cox and

Bleikasten. For collections of essays on The Sound and the Fury see Bloom and two books by Bleikasten. For good basic articles not mentioned elsewhere, see Gold and Collins; for an annotated bibliography on Faulkner's female characters, see Sweeney.

[14] For a discussion of the "ghost-woman" theme see Muhlenfeld.

[15] Though he does not consider the bodies of Caddy and Addie, Watkins does acknowledge that "those who know and understand do not speak the words" and that The Sound and the Fury and As I Lay Dying both "turn upon the silent women at the center of the work" (185-86). See also chapter twelve in Morris and Morris.

[16] Lilly treats Caddy and Addie together as characters who "transcend the limits of narrative form" (171). He does not, however, consider the force of their bodies but focuses on their silence and the "blank space in the 'Addie' monologue" (179).

[17] For early, general texts on Caddy see Wagner's "Language," chapter three in Williams, and discussions by Baum, Longley, and Hill. Caddy is also given attention in Jackson's discussion of Faulkner female types. Some of these texts are reprinted in a collection of essays on Caddy edited by Bloom. There is little recent critical attention to Caddy; one notable exception is chapter two in Gwin.

[18] As Ross suggests, maybe Quentin "can understand

sex if it is put into words" (253).

[19] Wagner's "Language" and Godden's "William" both suggest that women make men talk. Wagner calls Caddy a language giver (50), and Godden connects language to the Fall, contending that Faulkner believes "words are female" and that language is "a temptation offered by the female" (117).

[20] Wittenberg proposes that this talking is one of the ways men control women. Women in Faulkner's novels are defined by "male words" and are only seen through the men who discuss them ("Women" 107).

[21] Clarke proposes that men in Faulkner's novels use figurative language while women use literal language. Figurative language is traditionally more highly valued, but in Faulkner's world literal language has more power, an argument that could be analogous to the body vs. mind approach to language.

[22] Frazer describes Addie as "the most explicitly bloody woman in Faulkner" (175).

[23] Note the similarity between Darl's self-debate and Quentin's "I was I was not who was not was not who" (211).

[24] Clarke argues that men in Faulkner's novels are tormented because "they allow the women to signify nothing other than projections of the male imagination" (402).

[25] In this passage, Anse insists that if God had intended man to go places he would have put him "on his

belly, like a snake" and concludes by saying "It stands to reason He would" (35). The word "stands," taken literally, adds an interesting dimension to the vertical/horizontal debate and evokes the image of Satan as snake in Paradise Lost, who stands when he uses his intellect.

[26] Pierce believes Addie's problem was not that she chose sex but that she chose language, and implies that certain turning points in Addie's life--childbirth, adultery, for example--occurred because of her need to reverse that error (299-301). Slaughter questions whether Addie really can "escape the function or the necessity of words" (17).

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