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THE SIXTH SENSE:
Faulknerian Synesthesia and Perspective

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Professor Alan DeGooyer, Advisor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
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**INTRODUCTION:
The Idiosyncratic and the Interesting:
Meeting Faulkner's Famed Synesthetes**

For Faulkner, asking Is the sky blue? may yield a “Yes,” but it may also be cinnamon-scented, warm-looking and melancholy. In the modernist works of William Faulkner, senses are not always what they seem. For some characters, the cold is bright and time is heard. Others “see” with their noses, hear the face of a family member or smell the very life that emanates from within. These unique sensory amalgamations arise from a neurological condition known as synesthesia, or the mixing of the senses. Synesthesia is the production of a sensory response in one modality when a different modality is stimulated, such as smell triggering a visual response, sound producing a chromatic array or the shape of an object causing its beholder to hear its presence. Although most research on synesthesia is fairly recent (within the past several decades), Faulkner’s works are crowded with synesthetic perceptions and characterizations, some overt and others more subtle and nuanced. Surprisingly, Faulkner's synesthetic characters are often, if not always, those who are emotionally or mentally disturbed, or even deficient. But they are often his most insightful or predictive, in ways the reader does not immediately expect. Ultimately, Faulkner employs sensory synesthesia in ways that are provocative and productive enough to draw the reader toward a larger philosophical examination of boundaries and structure, and the oppressive nature of the supposedly objective societal and temporal structures that we think define and explain humanity. Synesthesia becomes a device that Faulkner uses to delve directly into the inherently idiosyncratic nature of the human mind and its sensory experiences, ultimately breaking down logic and boundary not only in individual human thought, but also in the feeble human quest for standards and structure, and the ever-elusive position from which objective judgement is possible.

First it is imperative to understand the clinical definition of synesthesia: Historically considered to be a type of hallucination or delusion, the imaginings of the psychotic, synesthesia is now understood as simply a neurological condition in which a sensation in one modality triggers a sensation in another. For example, a synesthete may experience bursts of color when she hears music, or experience taste when she reads certain words. In more extreme cases of synesthesia, individuals experience different numbers, letters or words as having gender or even personality; for instance, the fact that $5 + 4 = 9$ may not intrinsically not make sense to a synesthete, because the first two digits do not “get along.” For others, days of the week appear in color, sounds are physically felt and the calendar spirals around one's body. Others smell, see or physically feel audible sounds. Research on synesthesia has become more prolific in the past several decades, and it is widely assumed that synesthesia is hereditary. While there is no accurate data on what percentage of people actually have synesthesia, evidence suggests that those who do are often creative and imaginative, whether in art, writing, music or mathematical abilities (Cytowic). Synesthesia is sometimes found in individuals who exhibit savant-like behaviors, or those with Asperger's, as in the case of Daniel Tammet, a British man who was able to memorize thousands of digits of pi by remembering the color and shape of each number (Tammet). Several noted synesthetes include Wolfgang Mozart, Wassily Kandinsky, Vladimir Nabokov, Virginia Woolf, Duke Ellington, James Joyce and William Faulkner. For the modernist and post-modernist writers of this bunch, synesthesia becomes a recurrent and important aspect of their prose, and is often a defining trait of specific narratives and characters.

While not all of Faulkner's synesthetes are equally perceptive, his notable synesthetes in *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, and *Light in August* are distinctly different. We can, in fact, trace an evolution, across these renowned novels, of human consciousness as it originates

from its pre-logical beginnings in the synesthetic, infantile idiot Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*; to the development—and danger—of language and logic in *As I Lay Dying*; to the problematized and suffocative nature of societal boundaries and binary racial structures in *Light in August*.

In particular, Benjy, in *The Sound and the Fury* serves as a means to explain and accept the pre-logical, undifferentiated sensory beginnings of human consciousness, and the inevitable truth that follows this understanding and acceptance. With the consciousness of an infant or small child, Benjy exemplifies an undifferentiated mode of perception, most explicitly through his overtly synesthetic narration. His synesthesia is usually marked by smell and sight—he often smells traditionally visual objects (like trees, or his sister Caddy), or he sees something invisible, like the cold. In the novel, Benjy and his brother Quentin are unlike in behavior—the former is virtually a man-child and the latter a Harvard student—but the brothers share at least one commonality: both experience synesthesia. However, unlike Benjy, Quentin is verbal and logical. While Benjy's world is entirely sensory, Quentin's synesthesia almost entirely centers on time, a logical, man-made construct which he can “hear” and “feel” tangibly. And unlike Benjy, who is oblivious to man-made constructs and lives purely through sensation, Quentin attempts to use his synesthetic relationship with the temporal as a means to control time.

Initially in *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner introduces synesthesia, through a close examination of Benjy, as a naturally occurring, pre-logical trait. In a sense this is wholly appropriate. Research shows that in infants, the undifferentiated nature of the senses is common and perhaps even ubiquitous until a certain age (Cytowic). As a grown man who is sexless and speechless, Benjy largely resembles an infant, and it makes sense that through him Faulkner demonstrates the priority of synesthesia in the young, whose consciousness is arguably untainted

by the imposition of social constructs that feign objectivity. Of course, synesthesia is inherently the opposite of objectivity; there is no function or algorithm that defines it in general; individuals' specific synesthetic pairings are idiosyncratic and, neurologically speaking, stipulated only by the individual cross-wirings in each brain. They cannot be shared. Nevertheless, Faulkner's synesthetic characters—especially the virtually mute Benjy—desire to communicate. The boy-man moans almost constantly, but his sound is unshaped by logic, language, society or temporal structure, just as infantile synesthesia is born of undifferentiated sensation.

While *The Sound and the Fury* is useful as an exploration of pre-logical, pre-verbal human consciousness, *As I Lay Dying* shows characters struggling with the acquisition of human language, and indicates that while language is useful for communication, it will never suffice as an objective means of characterizing the world. In this novel, we witness the construction of language from sensory experiences. Language arises when the senses are experienced simultaneously, remembered and related to previous and subsequent sensory experiences. In *As I Lay Dying*, Vardaman especially is demonstrative of this phenomenon. Fittingly, his intellect is only a notch or two above the infantile Benjy; but as a synesthete, Vardaman is particularly receptive to smell and sound, and often he experiences these sensations synesthetically when confronted with iconic sights such as his mother's face and her deathbed. Vardaman is the verbal, semi-logical version of Benjy—he speaks and can make connections between sensory experiences, as with his “My mother is a fish” statement, but formal logic is lost on him, especially when his brother Darl tries to trick him with his manipulation of language. Also a synesthete, Darl exemplifies the danger of using language as a means of control instead of communication. When he attempts to impose a severe logical and linguistic structure on the

almost primarily sensory cognition of Vardaman, among others, Darl ends up dissociating himself from his world and those around him, but not in a transcendent, objective way. Rather, just as Quentin attempts to transcend his perspective by escaping time, Darl attempts to escape via language, and ultimately loses himself to insanity. And then there is Addie, whose dying wish drives her family to—barely—overcome the odds and bury her in Jefferson, and who is arguably the protagonist of the novel, though she only narrates a single section, and posthumously at that. Yet, even in her few pages of commentary, Addie’s synesthetic narration is self-aware: Language can never fully convey sensation. Her words will never be enough.

Of course as a writer himself, Faulkner is bound to language as the means through which his characters' stories are told. Yet even the novelist warns of the futility of language as a means of fully conveying sensation or reality, especially if we look to it as an objective means of rendering the world. Faulkner illustrates the danger of false absolutes through Darl's manipulation of language and consequent dissociation from himself and others. Furthermore, Faulkner's own prose is fragmented and disruptive; it claims its own non-objectivity with the use of multiple narrators, unstructured syntax and stream-of-consciousness narratives. It demonstrates that a fine line exists between the use of language as a tool and the over-usage of language as a false form of objectivity.

Faulkner presents a broader, more conceptual synesthesia in *Light in August*. The novel follows Joe Christmas, a supposedly biracial man adopted by strict Calvinists, who is plagued with the curse of his unknown parentage and is later convicted with the murder of his lover. In this case, synesthesia is not explicitly a matter of sensory combinations—though Christmas’ perceptions are at times synesthetic, as he invents his own unique compound words such as “dryscented” or “hardsmelling.” Rather, synesthesia is presented more conceptually or abstractly

as an unexplained dialectic between Christmas' black and white identities. Admittedly, it is difficult to argue that this relationship is a purely synesthetic one, as it seems to be more of a societally-constructed paradox than an innate, prior synthesis. But later it will become clear as to how Faulkner's characterization of his multi-faceted and multi-racial character Joe Christmas achieves the same function as does sensory synesthesia in both *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*.

As compared to the idiot-poet Benjy¹, Darl, Quentin and Joe experience synesthesia with a cerebral or reflective tinge, and their intellection and introspection morphs dangerously into a quest for self-definition in the form of objective judgement. Quentin's synesthetic relationship with time becomes an obsession, and eventually his close relationship with time becomes an attempt to control it. Darl's fluidity with language seduces him to shape it into a device to gain (he thinks) objective control. And Joe grasps at blackness to escape the troubled waters of his racially murky identity, though ends up accepting and adopting Southern society's stereotypical status-quo for the black male. In all cases, Faulkner warns against the faux-objective, imposed structure as truth, suggesting that we can better access truth by accepting or adopting a more synesthetic mode; ideally, that all the "senses" should combine to inform a perspective, a novel, a society, a world—but that to possess every "sense" objectively is inherently impossible, as we each are inextricably positioned within our sociocultural-temporal, mental worlds. Thus, the more "synesthetic" we become, the less we fall prey to biased, restrictive social constructs.

While mysterious and bewildering, the neurological condition known as synesthesia is also a fascinating and telling lens through which scientists, psychologists and of course novelists can speculate on the subjective nature of individual human consciousness. Faulkner characterizes synesthesia in precisely this way: specifically as an inroad to a broader dialogue on how the

mind, language and society operate. And in doing so, Faulkner ends up shouting from the page, again and again, that seeking an objective perspective to characterize any of the above is misleading, impossible and metaphysically perilous.

CHAPTER ONE:
An Inevitably Cross-Sensory World:
Common Manifestations of Synesthesia in Thought and Language

While the world's population of synesthetes is a relatively small minority, the commonality of synesthetic tropes in everyday thought and ordinary language is striking, especially in a world in which for most, synesthesia is often an eerie unknown, or at best a puzzling mystery. If we are to understand synesthesia—both neurologically and artistically, through literature—as a vestige of a still-innocent, still-whole consciousness untainted and not yet confronted by imposed logical structures—then perhaps we should look at our often-synesthetic understanding of the world as a vestige of our pre-logical pasts. Mixed perception like Benjy's in *The Sound and the Fury* is not really so unusual: We describe notes as flat, sharp and sweet; people as having sour dispositions or feeling blue; logic as circular and ideas as bright. And in doing so we rarely consider these descriptions to be the effects of an offbeat sensory wiring within our brains. In fact, the above classifications are so common to modern English speech that we do not at all consider them idiosyncratic—as we do actual synesthetic pairings. Instead, a “sour” disposition or “brilliant” idea are widely accepted—so much so that they are hardly conceived as synesthetic, at least without deeper consideration of the sensory amalgamation that such phrases in fact entail.

In *Wednesday is Indigo Blue: Discovering the Brain of Synesthesia*, British neurologist Richard Cytowic explains the commonality of certain cross-modal perceptions to both synesthetes and non-synesthetes alike:

As Larry Marks pointed out, 'Many of the very same rules that govern the perception of the synesthetic minority also govern perceptual and verbal behavior of the non-synesthetic majority.' This suggests that synesthesia rests on a shared core of cross-sensory similarities—ones that appear to be innate in early life and derive from fundamental

similarities in phenomenal experience itself. These in turn gradually become available to the more abstract system of knowledge embodied in language (Cytowic 171).

A 1929 experiment by Ramachandran and Hubbard, published in a paper titled “Synesthesia—A Window into Perception, Thoughts and Language,” explores this linguistic embodiment of synesthesia. The experimenters investigated the reactions of speakers of various languages to two differently-shaped drawings. Participants were told that one of the abstract drawings was named “kiki” and the other was named “bouba”—made-up words in an “alien” language—and it was up to the participants to decide which name suited which drawing. One drawing was blob-shaped, and the other was spiked. Ramachandran and Hubbard found that 98 percent of participants named the spiked-shaped drawing “kiki.” As Cytowic explains in *Wednesday is Indigo Blue*, this consistency in naming the shapes is:

because [the] visual acuteness [of the shapes] mimics the motor and auditory inflection” of the sounds made when each word is pronounced. The spiked shape features visual jags that “mimic the ‘kiki’ sound and the sharp tongue inflection against the palate. By contrast, the blob’s rounded visual contours are more like the sound and motor inflections of “bouba” (Cytowic 166).

The kiki/bouba experiment, conducted across cultural and linguistic differences, illustrates that there is a natural pattern for how we connect the senses—in this case, the visual and the auditory. Of course, the experiment differs from natural synesthesia—the kind of sensory connections for which Faulkner's characters are known, in one important way. The “synesthetic” connection between two modalities—vision and hearing—is shared, for one, whereas with lexical-gustatoryⁱⁱ or color-graphemeⁱⁱⁱ synesthesia, individuals' pairings are just that—individual. So, while the round shape may always be “bouba,” the number 3 is not always turquoise, and the letter B is not always green. Granted, these experimental participants were asked to make a synesthetic connection within relatively limited circumstances—they were given a one-to-one ratio of item to name. They were to assign each of the two names to one of the two shapes, not to

invent their own names for the shapes. (It would, perhaps, be interesting to investigate the inflection of the names participants would give for these shapes, if given the freedom to do so.) In a sense, Ramachandran and Hubbard confined their participants to limited conditions, but even given the constraints of the kiki/bouba experiment, what we learn from its inquiry is that the tendency to think synesthetically—albeit circumstantially, in the case of the experiment—is far from unnatural to the human mind.

So, while naturally-occurring synesthesia is uncommon among the collective population, synesthetic tendencies within our collective mode of thought—or even that of the individual—are not. Cytowic claims that the cross-cultural correspondence demonstrated by the kiki/bouba case illustrates “the rule that pre-existing relationships (analogies) are often co-opted in biology. In this way, synesthetic associations our ancestors established long ago grew into the more abstract expressions we know today—and this is why metaphors make sense” (Cytowic 165-166). But can such a “pre-existing relationship” even be considered synesthesia? If we are to understand synesthesia as pre-logical and prior to analytical thought, then how can synesthesia ever be equated with a logically-constructed metaphor? Even in the kiki/bouba case, it seems as if far too much analysis must go into the idea that the detailed contours of each shape matches the inflection of each word. But in a case of, say, grapheme synesthesia, there is no logical reason why, for example, the letter X is gray, Y is white, and so on. The difference between the synesthesia evoked during the experiment and typical synesthesia is that the former is a shared and logically explainable connection, while the latter is highly idiosyncratic.

While we already know that synesthesia is a result of cross-wirings in the brain, and that its idiosyncratic perceptions are a result of the unique nature of individuals’ neural structures, it is important to consider why some facets of synesthetic perception seem to be shared, as

demonstrated by the kiki/bouba case. In the experiment, it seems that an underlying sensory code dictates the relationship between the jagged shape and “kiki,” and the rounded shape and “bouba.” That code seems to be comprised both of an inherent ability (even if it is only situational under highly suggestive conditions, as in the experiment) to connect the senses intuitively, and of the tendency to subject such a connection to analytical review, so that the sound of each word matches the shape of each drawing. For instance, Sean Day notes in his research that colored sounds are the “most common expression of perceptual synesthesia, whereas metaphoric elaborations of tactile sound are most common in (English) literary synesthesia. It appears likely that human thought itself is largely metaphoric.” Sean Day also concludes that synesthetically seeing sounds, which antedates language, has probably influenced language development (Cytowic 171-172).

This combination of synesthesia (or at least sense-mixing, if not entirely akin to the neurological condition) and fitting logical comparison is not uncommon to language. Let’s call it metaphor. Cytowic does just this, and cites several iterations of metaphoric conception of orientation and mood. For example, what is “good” is often paired with an upper position, and what is “bad” with a lower position in space, such as a “peak year” or an “all-time low,” respectively. Rationality is also associated with an upper position, and emotionality with a lower place: One’s heart can “sink,” or one can engage in a “lofty” academic discussion. Similarly, ideas are often associated with light or sight: We envision the future, have bouts of brilliance and criticize a murky proposal to make it more lucid (Cytowic 167-168). The tendency to meld the senses and our perceptual experience of them is also evidenced through music and dance. Think of a musician’s facial expression as it mirrors the notes he plays, whether it be surprised, morose or joyful. And dance is nothing more than the melding of music and movement—the auditory and

the visual. When a choreographer “matches” dance movements to a song, she is in a sense referring to some sort of underpinning perceptual code that governs what “fits” with what. And in many languages nouns are often assigned gender. Of course, these synesthetic metonymies and deliberate pairing of two more more modalities are not all examples of naturally-occurring synesthesia, but they do indeed expose the blending of the senses that takes place in everyday speech.

As briefly mentioned earlier, synesthesia is far more common in children than in adults. The infantile and childhood consciousness, as it develops, often sheds its synesthetic pairings and “childhood thought becomes condensed and accelerated as it is internalized from more physically based cross-sensory associations to the felt meaning of inner speech ... Children internalize speech by age six to seven, and felt meaning is synesthetically structured, bearing the basis of metaphoric understanding that develops later in childhood” (Cytowic 172). Thus, an early existence of infantile or childhood synesthesia allows cross-sensory connections to be naturally made through perception.

This underlying foundation of cross-sensory perceptions seems to function as a primer for the acquisition of metaphoric comparisons, and in turn the linguistic capabilities of comparison, synthesis and analysis. Thus, in the Faulknerian trajectory of consciousness from Benjy and beyond, fittingly not just pre-logical children, but post-logical adults as well, exhibit synesthesia—or at least remnants of it. The difference is that they also have developed linguistic capabilities, which we can understand as a natural outcropping of the connective, communicative synesthetic consciousness.

**CHAPTER TWO:
The Pre-logical Origins of Consciousness:
How the Silent Idiot Says It All**

Faulkner chronicles the progression from the pre-logical beginnings of language, to communication, and then to supposedly “logical” social constructs in the same order that he has written these three novels. In *The Sound and the Fury*, the pre-logical and inherently sensory, synesthetic nature of thought are brought immediately to the foreground in the opening section, narrated by Benjy Compson, an idiot of thirty-three. We gather that Benjy's absence of sexuality, as well as his emotional attachment to his sister Caddy, keep him perpetually moaning, seemingly for himself. But Benjy’s incessant cries are more than mere noise: although he is virtually mute, Faulkner's narration of his feelings and “thought” indicate Benjy’s multi-faceted perceptual abilities and richly synesthetic perspective.

The sensory nature of Benjy’s narrative is vivid not only because it is rich in smell, sound, color and texture, but because of the ways in which he often experiences these elements simultaneously. Though his language lacks immediate coherence, his sensory experience is inherently amalgamated. This is telling: Benjy has no developed linguistic capacities and is akin to a young child. Fittingly, Benjy’s synesthesia is appropriate for a character who essentially provides a pre-logical perspective in which undifferentiated senses are still bundled into one conglomerated mass. Cytowic suggests that synesthesia is profuse in infancy. In *Wednesday is Indigo Blue*, Cytowic draws on 19th and 20th century research by psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who found in an 1883 study that 40 percent of children surveyed “described musical instrument sounds as colored,” while adults experience the condition in much less frequent numbers. “Thus,

the overall impression is that synesthesia is several times more common in children than adults. Because most synesthetes claim to remember having synesthesia far back in childhood, a plausible conclusion is that a proportion of childhood synesthetes lose their synesthesia as they grow up” (Cytowic 11). Cytowic and Eagleman also suggest that the cause for a disappearance of synesthesia in most older children and adolescents could be due to the fact that it is replaced by abstract thought and language. “As such, there may be a cognitive continuum beginning with perception, reaching to perceptual similarities, then to synesthesia, then to metaphor and finally to abstract language” (Cytowic 13).

Well before these doctors' observations, and virtually any modern research on infantile or childhood synesthesia, Faulkner both cursed and endowed his famous idiot-poet Benjy with the trait. The man-child who smells the “bright cold” presents a messy stream-of-consciousness narration punctuated by frequent, starkly-recorded synesthetic sensory perceptions. As is often the case with synesthesia, Benjy's sensory pairings are not logically constructed or explainable. Early in the novel Benjy sees laundry hanging outside and can “smell the clothes flapping” in the breeze (*TSATF* 14). Smell is often Benjy's most prominent sense, and appears most in his synesthetic pairings. In this case, smell also represents sight, because through the “flapping”—an ostensibly visual (or perhaps tactile or auditory) perception, Benjy is able to smell the clothing, without any suggestion from the text that he is close enough to pick up a scent, or that he picks up the scent indirectly, from the wind, for example.

Later Benjy can smell his mother's “sickness,” when he enters her bedroom. Smell is the most clearly articulated sense, but others are certainly, albeit indirectly, attached to smell for Benjy: “There was a fire. It was rising and falling on the walls. There was another fire in the mirror ... [The sickness] was on a cloth folded on Mother's head. Her hair was on the pillow. The

fire didn't reach it, but it shone on her hand, where her rings were jumping” (*TSATF* 61). Here it is obvious that the sickness is smelled, but it is also seen, as illustrated through Benjy's perception of the cloth's position on top of his mother's head, which in turn triggers her hair on the pillow and the fire's proximity to his mother. What this passage also indicates is Benjy's lack of logic, and the fact that he operates almost entirely through perception. He sees the fire “rising and falling on the walls,” but has no conception of what it means to see a shadow. He perceives “another fire in the mirror” without being able to come to the logical conclusion that the fire is a reflection. And he cannot distinguish between the “jumping” rings of his mother and the illusion the fire and the lighting create. Later in the novel, as Benjy approaches the barn adjacent the Compson property with his stand-in caretaker, Luster, he thinks, “The shapes flowed on. The ones on the other side began again, bright and fast and smooth, like when Caddy says we are going to sleep ... (*TSATF* 12). Here it makes sense to understand the movement of shapes as the sensation of calm that he experiences before falling asleep. This same image surfaces when he sits by the fire one night with Caddy, and later at the end of his section when he rides in the carriage to Jefferson. In the latter example, it seems as if the shapes are not evoked by a state of calm, but rather by the excitement of the carriage's motion. In the above examples, he emotively feels a joyful sensation, but logically cannot recognize the difference between calm joy and excited joy. In “A Rhetoric for Benjy,” Moffitt Cecil explores the significance of Benjy's bright shapes: “One of the most revealing words in Benjy's vocabulary is the noun shapes, or the phrase bright shapes,” Cecil explains. “Benjy is represented as responding with this image indiscriminately to designate feelings and yearnings which he cannot differentiate and for which therefore he can have no words” (Cecil 70).

For instance, during a discussion of why Benjy's name was changed from Maury (Benjamin is more biblical, according to Caddy), Luster antagonizes Benjy by poking him in the shoulder with a hot wire, and Benjy of course begins to cry. Dilsey and her son Luster begin to fight, and as Benjy watches, he claims that he “could still hear the clock between [his] voice” (*TSATF* 63). Benjy synesthetically perceives both the clock and his own moaning as physically laid out in space. And later, in a flash-forward to Benjy moaning in his sister's old childhood room, long after she has moved out of the Compson house, the man-child sits in the darkness, clutching what seems to be an old slipper of Caddy's. He says, “I couldn't see it, but my hands saw it, and I could hear it getting night, and my hands saw the slipper but I couldn't see myself, but my hands could see the slipper, and I squatted there, hearing it getting dark” (*TSATF* 72). Benjy does have a sense of self, as indicated by his acknowledgement that he “couldn't see” himself in the darkness; but this self is almost wholly defined by raw, unadulterated, amalgamated perceptions—his touching the slipper is what allows him to “see” it as he “hears” the darkness set in.

A discerning reading of Benjy—and the whole novel—requires us to understand exactly how he emerges as both an idiot-poet and a Faulknerian paradigm for the pre-verbal and pre-logical consciousness (where “pre” indicates such possibilities in the future^{iv}). Benjy's identity and characterization is complex: He is born Maury Compson but his name is later changed to Benjy. He is thirty-three, cannot speak for himself, and persistently moans incoherently, and therefore cannot achieve any kind of independence separate from his family. Of course for Benjy, neither distinction nor division exists, as is most clearly evident in his sensory perceptions, which comprise virtually all of his narration and character. In his essay “Trying Not to Say: A Primer on

the Language of *The Sound and the Fury*,” Noel Polk illustrates how Benjy's synesthesia works as a simultaneity of perceptions, and how his narration mirrors his synesthetic experience:

[S]ince Benjy is not capable of . . . differentiating one sensation from any other, we can account for the profusion of synesthesia in his section; he does not actually say that “The sun was cold and bright” or that he could “smell the bright cold,” but rather reflects the physical sensations of what we would call “cold” and “bright” and the visual sensation of “sun” as registering on him simultaneously . . . Just as his mind allows no distinctions among his sensations that would put them in some kind of ordered relationship, so does his language refuse [syntactic structure.] There are almost no subordinate clauses in Benjy's section, and so almost no subordination, no adjectival or adverbial modifications . . . Mechanically, there are not even variations in end punctuation that would register differentiation in the way he processes sensations, much less how they affect him or even if they affect him at all (Polk 145-146).

Both Benjy's senses and sentences arise synesthetically. One telling example arises early in his narration when he and Luster walk towards the golf course adjacent the Compson property, and, hearing the word “caddie,” Benjy thinks of his sister. Benjy has no regard for or understanding of logic or linguistic context, and is only receptive to sensory stimuli—in this case, the uttering of what he believes to be his sister's name. All that matters is the auditory signal that triggers Benjy's response.

As Polk indicates, Benjy also lacks the logical discretion to convey the punctuation inherent in others' dialogue. Similarly, he blends the dialects of others whom he hears, coalescing all the facets of others' speech into a raw, stripped, toneless, inflectionless and expressionless soup of linguistic simplicity. As someone who is so intrinsically sensory, Benjy is a poor reporter of differences in heard speech and visible appearance among characters. His narration (or Faulkner's narration in his stead) makes virtually no mention of differences in race, and the words on the page reflect no variance in dialect among different speakers. It is productive to read Benjy's narrative neutrality as Faulkner's intentional disregard; Benjy's consciousness does not recognize or understand the differences between individuals that matter in greater society. Since Benjy's mind is idiosyncratic in its synesthetic pairings, since it is a place where division and

classification are virtually impossible, it is inherently pre-logical. By representing Benjy as pre-logical, as an infantile synesthete, Faulkner can directly comment on the differences between the sensorily amalgamated nature of prior, infantile consciousness and the divisive nature of the society in which the Compsons live.

To understand the importance of synesthesia in the novel, then, it is useful to begin with Benjy because his sensory amalgamations are indicative of the type of consciousness—at its extreme—from which we all begin. “The Benjy section comes first in the novel for the simple reason that Benjy, of all the narrators, cannot lie, which is to say he cannot create,” writes Donald Kartiganer in “The Dislocation of Form.” “Being an idiot, Benjy's perception is prior to consciousness, prior to the human need to abstract from events an intelligible order ... Benjy's monologue is never more, or less, than truth” (Kartiganer 24-28). And while Benjy is unable to master basic conversation, he exhibits a subtle ability to intuit resonant truths about his world.

The starkest example of his eerie intuition occurs when Benjy is troubled by Caddy's dirty clothes after Quentin pushes her into the mud. As the scene begins, the Compson children's friend Versh warns Caddy not get her dress wet by playing in the water. Caddy and Quentin begin to argue about whether Caddy will be whipped for ruining her dress. As a result, Caddy decides to take off her dress, and when she does, Quentin slaps her, causing her to fall into the muddy water. She and Quentin continue to fight, and Caddy claims that she will “run away and never come back” (*TSATF* 64). Benjy begins to cry, and Caddy attempts to console him, assuming that his moaning is a result of her threat to leave him. But according to Benjy's narration, Caddy's muddy drawers—the result of Quentin shoving her into the water—are the cause of Benjy's trauma: “Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry.” Immediately after, he acknowledges that, “Caddy smells like trees in the rain” (*TSATF* 64). After a brief

interlude during which Benjy and the other young children drink the forbidden “sasprilluh” alcohol, they venture back outdoors to the tree that Caddy's father has forbade her to climb. She climbs it anyway, despite warnings from Versh and Frony. Benjy is still fixated on Caddy's dirty clothing as she climbs into the tree, though when the tree ceases its thrashing and the branches become still, Benjy looks up toward where his sister would be and sees a vision of “Caddy, with flowers in her hair, and a long veil shining like wind” (*TSATF* 39). However, the terror that the present reality of Caddy and her soiled clothes inspires in Benjy is visceral: He begins to claw his hands against the wall, crying and lashing towards Caddy so that the others try to restrain him.

Clearly Benjy is upset, and for Faulkner, not without reason. We can gather from Benjy's narrative that he is indeed traumatized by the sight of his sister's dirty clothing, by Caddy's soiled appearance. It is important to note that Benjy is not merely bothered, but devastated, by Caddy's dirtiness. It is equally important to closely examine the details of the scene in which Benjy's tantrum—unlike any of his others—occurs. Benjy is first upset by the sight of Caddy's clothing, which becomes dirty after Quentin slaps her and she falls into the mud. It seems that Benjy is upset by Caddy's threat to run away, or perhaps even by Quentin's rudeness toward Caddy. But we are told that Benjy begins to cry immediately after he is confronted with the sight of Caddy's muddy drawers. Something specifically about muddiness on Caddy must upset him. Caddy usually serves as a mother figure to Benjy, comforting and caring for him. He admires and relies upon her for a sense of security and connection with his family, both practically and emotionally. And when she is degraded—by Quentin's harsh violence and especially by the mud—Benjy's vision of Caddy is forced to change—she suddenly becomes vile, out of control and, worst of all, broken

down. For once in Benjy's eyes, Caddy is tainted and torn apart, no longer the wholesome, strong being whom Benjy knows and loves.

In the almost immediately following scene, Benjy watches as Caddy climbs into the forbidden tree. “We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn’t see her. We could hear the tree thrashing,” Benjy narrates (*TSATF* 39). This description by Benjy is odd for several poignant reasons: First, it is much more coherent and straightforward than his typical stream of consciousness, with its awkward—or missing—punctuation. Even more profoundly, these short, separate sentences indicate Benjy's experience of an unusual sensory break in his perceived reality. He at first watches Caddy—specifically “the muddy bottom of her drawers”—as she climbs into the tree. In a separate sentence, Benjy explains that he could no longer see his sister after she disappears into the tree. And in a third sentence, he can “hear the tree thrashing.” First there is sight, then there is *not* sight^v, and then there is sound. In this scene, Benjy's senses do not arise simultaneously; his synesthesia effectively disappears, and the text indicates a clear division between the senses. Fittingly, the division of Benjy's closest connection with the world—his senses—parallels the destruction his closest companion—Caddy—into a tainted, broken-down individual.

The introduction of a broken Caddy is a horror that, in this particular scene, Benjy faces for the first time. In fact, this is the first time that Benjy, whose sensory experiences are so inherently interwoven, experiences fragmentation at all. Like the disappearance of his synesthesia, the fragmentation of Caddy's image is also unnatural for Benjy. Essentially, Benjy must grapple with the break between this new vision of Caddy and his previous perception of his sister. Understanding Caddy to be tainted is clearly unnatural for Benjy, indicated by the vision he experiences after his sister disappears into the tree. When the tree ceases its thrashing and the

branches become still, Benjy looks up toward where his sister would be and sees “Caddy, with flowers in her hair, and a long veil shining like wind” (*TSATF* 39). He clearly imagines this vision of his sister, and it is obviously different from the present Caddy, who is tainted by the mud. Benjy is likely forcing the soiled version of Caddy out of mind (she is at the moment out of sight) and replacing her with a more pleasing, natural, untainted vision of his sister, one of the pure girl who “smells like trees.”

Interestingly, this scene is the only time that Benjy perceives Caddy's scent as that of “trees in the rain.” He claims that she smells like trees in the rain just after he begins to cry at the sight of her muddy clothing. Usually, Caddy just “smells like trees,” but in this case she smells like trees in the rain. (Later in this narrative section, Benjy perceives Quentin as smelling like rain, but this sentiment is not Benjy's typical description of Caddy.) Benjy seems to be gradually solving a puzzle, one that has not even become fully manifest in the novel. Through his sense of smell, Benjy experiences the severity of Quentin tainting Caddy. For Benjy, the rain taints—or touches—the trees, and then the trees smell like rain. After she is broken down by Quentin, Caddy smells like trees in the rain, not simply trees. (Caddy, of course, will eventually become sexually “tainted” and “broken,” as Quentin later tells us.) Benjy intuitively predicts this “tragedy” so resonantly and eerily. Fascinatingly, he relates to the impending tragedy so immediately, yet remains unable to express his feelings on the most basic verbal level.

The realization of a “broken” Caddy confronts Benjy with a new and, for him, unnatural way of perceiving the world: as full of divisions, fragmentations and a binary conception of reality. Faulkner illustrates Benjy's visceral response to a broken Caddy to demonstrate that for a consciousness that is so amalgamated and interconnected, compartmentalization is nearly impossible. Thus, understanding Caddy as divided between the pure and the tainted is anathema

to his nature. After the scene in the mud, there exists a before and after, a purity and impurity, an either-or, and Benjy cannot grapple with the distinction. With a pre-logical, undifferentiated means of perception, Benjy stands as the sole dialectical individual in the Compson family. And so too does his identity itself indicate a dialectical, fluid existence: He is Benjy and Maury, he is thirty-three but infantile, he is an intuitive idiot who is simultaneously unable to formulate sentences and able to perceive future tragedy, he is *both/and*, not *either/or*.

Benjy thus serves as the sole form of fluid dialectic—in terms of the senses and identity—in a household and society largely determined by boundaries and divisions based on class, gender, intelligence, and especially race. Warwick Waldington explicates Faulkner's textual manifestation of such boundaries and binary either-or relationships in his essay “A Logic of Tragedy”:

[The Compsons'] universe appears in the blanket social distinction between the 'quality' and the nonquality. The first category is further divided by Mrs. Compson's obsession with the status of Compsons versus that of the Bascombs ... The binary set informs her belief that 'there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not,' as well as Jason's identical idea that “Once a bitch, always a bitch' ... In this binary universe ... all distinctions become divisions ... The Compsons' isolation, frequently noted, is more than a historically accurate representation of the separatism of caste society, as are all the images of enclosure and boundaries—fences, gates, streams, doors, locked rooms, prisons ... Quentin's desperate fantasy of incest is in its own way a rigorous extension of the inbreeding attitude of a household that feels itself surrounded by relative nonentities” (Waldington 61-62).

While his household and society conceptualize the world as full of divisions and either-or constructions, Benjy is an unexplainable balance of unique—and seemingly contradictory—identity, just as synesthesia is an unexplainable, non-logical conglomeration of sensory experience.

Benjy also balances in limbo between mutism and the inherently communicative desire of human consciousness. No matter how individual, how idiosyncratic, his moans indicate that he wants to be heard. Benjy's almost incessant moans are not random, or merely a nervous tic; in fact, he responds directly to sensations or others' voices. This pre-verbal behavior can be read as

the origin of language: again like an infant, Benjy cries as a form of attempted communication. He opens his mouth and sound escapes, but no imposed structure exists to modify his primal, pre-logical expression. Oddly, he is pre-verbal instead of non-verbal. The difference between Benjy and a normal child is that though the child will grow out of infancy and eventually come to use language and grasp logic behind it, Benjy will not. But as consciousness evolves from the synesthetic pre-verbal and pre-logical to the use of language as a means to satisfy an inherent desire to communicate, we can read Faulkner's later characters as grappling with what Benjy couldn't: imposed constructs such as language, time or racial distinctions. While the pre-logical Benjy serves, for the most part, as a virtual recorder of synesthetic sensory perceptions—albeit an emotional, intuitive one—he lacks the logical framework of communicative language. Yet at the close of *The Sound and the Fury*, everything from the posts to the trees to the windows and doorways and signboards are “each in its ordered place” (*TSATF* 321). Indeed, a sense of order—and the false sense of objectivity it provides—is the prominent driving force behind the development of language, as opposed to synesthetic idiosyncrasy, throughout *As I Lay Dying*.

**CHAPTER THREE:
Faulkner's Commentary on Language:
“Not” Theory, and a New Kind of Beast**

As the Bundren family struggles to transport their deceased matriarch Addie to her desired place of rest, Faulkner carves out each member of the family's personality in stark relief: Anse is an absent-minded father and backward farmer; Cash is the carpenter who builds his mother's coffin and whose practicality and leadership cement the family; Jewel is a rebellious outsider fathered by another man; Dewey Dell is seventeen, pregnant and worried, on a quest to have a secret abortion; Darl is biting and quick-witted, unpredictable. And Vardaman, the youngest of the Bundren clan, is at times the most perplexing. He narrates several chapters in *As I Lay Dying*, and through his unique storytelling comes to life a simplistic, though surprisingly enlightened outlook. Like Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, Vardaman too is a synesthete; as a narrator he is simplistic and childish, yet mysteriously able to resonantly capture the novel's main themes and ideas. But what Vardaman brings to the table that Benjy ultimately lacks is the ability to make conscious connections between disparate sensations, between experiences that occur at different intervals in time. Language and basic logic serve Vardaman, whose consciousness is much more grounded than the undifferentiated and pre-logical realm that Benjy occupies. However, in Vardaman's case, his natural synesthesia is not squashed by the influx of language and logic from society. Rather Vardaman uses language and logic to convey his separate sensory experiences in a somewhat synesthetic mode. We could call it metaphor, but of course, the youngest Bundren is up to something else that, as we eventually see, in a less innocent mind is far more dangerous.

Although Vardaman is silent for much of the novel, the key difference between he and Benjy is that the former has acquired language—or at least a capacity for linguistic

communication. When he is first introduced in one of his brother Darl's sections, Vardaman is described as peering from behind his father's leg "with his round head and his eyes round and his mouth beginning to open" (*AILD* 30). The relevance of his open mouth is manifold. It indicates the desire to speak, or at least to communicate, as does Benjy's moaning in *The Sound and the Fury*. We learn, later, that Vardaman can speak, and that it is likely in this instance, as he watches his mother die, he is too shocked for words. Vardaman is taking in what he sees with his eyes, but the open eyes coupled with an open mouth indicate that two of his sensory channels are at the ready.

Like Benjy, Vardaman is primarily a sensory individual, and synesthetic at that. But his narration is significantly cleaner and more lucid, though his words are nevertheless deeply resonant. In his first narrative section, Vardaman begins in *medias res* (as is fitting for someone who embodies a dialectic and rebels against traditional divisions). He describes his actions just after he discovers that his mother has died: "Then I begin to run. I run toward the back and come to the edge of the porch and stop. Then I begin to cry" (*AILD* 34). The difference between Benjy's and Vardaman's respective narrative is stark: In Vardaman we see a delineated sequence that is absent from the total stream of consciousness of the man-child's narration in *The Sound and the Fury*. While it is unnatural for Benjy to narrate in short, direct sentences, Vardaman begins by doing just this. If we assume his narration is reflective of his perception, then Vardaman is indeed able to perceive the world as having distinct sensory components, unlike Benjy. And Vardaman's greater aptitude for language allows his synesthetic perceptions, especially, to come into a more focused light, as demonstrated by his instinct to run away into the barn after experiencing his mother's death:

"I jump from the porch, running. The top of the barn comes swooping up out of the twilight. If I jump I can go through it like the pink lady in the circus, into the warm

smelling ... I enter the stall, trying to touch him, and then I can cry then I vomit the crying ... The life in him runs under the skin, under my hand, running through the splotches, smelling up into my nose where the sickness is beginning to cry, vomiting the crying ... I can smell the life running up from under my hands, up my arms, and then I can leave the stall" (*AILD* 34).

In this passage, Vardaman is clearly fixated on the "life" as a substance that seems to emanate from the animal he holds tight, a substance he can smell and feel "running up" his hands and arms. The warmth of the barn, as well as the life of its inhabitants, are reassuring to Vardaman in the wake of his mother's passing. He as much as informs us that the smell of "warm" and "life" are ointments on the fresh wound of Addie's death.

After his mother's passing at the outset of the novel, Vardaman is fixated on death or, more accurately, he is fixated on the seemingly unnatural divide between death and life. This fixation is comparable to the discomfort Benjy feels in *The Sound and the Fury* when he experiences Caddy as a fractured being who was at a time pure and then suddenly is not. Of course, Vardaman is more able to articulate his feelings. The influence of language on Vardaman's reaction to being presented with a similar kind of binary structure—life and death—is illustrative. While Benjy's tantrum after sensing his sister's impurity consists only of a sensory response—the sound of his furious moaning and thrashing—Vardaman attempts to puzzle out the binary relationship between "dead" and "not dead." He does so most painstakingly in his second section of narrative, when he thinks about the finished coffin that Cash has made, and what will go into it. Nervously, he asks his brother Cash if he will "nail her up in it," and Vardaman is disturbed at this prospect because he recalls the time that he "got shut up in the crib the new door it was too heavy for me it went shut I couldn't breathe because the rat was breathing up all the air" (*AILD* 42). Here his worry is telling: he still conceptualizes his mother as needing to breathe, and thus as being alive. Later, he drills holes in her coffin for just this reason. Vardaman doesn't

seem to be able to separate the two opposite states. And this instance is not unique. Just two paragraphs later, Vardaman seems to use logic, albeit a blurred version of it, when he asks his father Anse, “Why ain't I a town boy, pa?” Vardaman reasons that, “God made me. I did not said to God to make me in the country” (*AILD* 42). Thus, he assumes that his opinion ought to—or even could—have been taken into account before God created him, apparently believing that he could have impacted something before he ever existed, just as he similarly assumes that his dead mother will need holes drilled into her coffin to breathe. These early attempts at reason are important because they indicate that while he has logical language capacities, clear logical distinction is not natural to Vardaman. The lines between life and death, between is and is not, are still blurred for him. To put it bluntly, he is a just a step—although a significant one—above Benjy.

In the same passage, just sentences later, Vardaman comes to his own realization that the woman lying in the coffin is not his mother. He literally thinks she has been replaced by another being: “It was not her. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away” (*AILD* 42). Again, Vardaman's logic is shaped by mixed signals. When he understands the body in the box to not be his mother, he fills the void with another being, once more demonstrating that the concept “not” or non-being is foreign to him. When something disappears, it becomes something else or is replaced by something else. Thus, he does not simply tell us that his mother is “not,” but he explains that she was in a sense replaced.

Vardaman's second section ends in a virtually transition-less break from his worry about his mother (or not-mother) being able to breathe in the coffin to a thoughtful though jumbled comparison of his mother and the fish he caught, now lying in the frying pan, dead and chopped.

Thus, he goes from thinking of his mother as a living being who needs to breathe to thinking of her as an entity as dead as a mutilated fish. The “my mother is a fish” sentence is telling: Earlier Vardaman explains that the fish was not his mother, because it was “laying right yonder in the dirt.” It makes sense that Vardaman would use this observation to rule out the fact that the fish was not his mother, because “laying right yonder in the dirt” is unlikely something that his mother would do. Later, the fish is chopped up and is placed into the pan. “Then it wasn't and she was,” Vardaman explains, meaning that the fish is not living, though his mother still is. “ ... [A]nd now it is and she wasn't,” he continues (*AILD* 43). It is as if Vardaman believes that the fish “is” in the sense that it is being made into a meal, that it is marked by relevance instead of absence. Later we will see even more clearly how Vardaman, an individual whose understanding of the world is so rooted in his sense perceptions, struggles with the mere thought of absence.^{vi}

Vardaman then makes a metaphorical leap and subtly relates the fish to his mother: “And tomorrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash an Dewey Dell...” (*AILD* 43). In this sentence, we can assume that “it” is the fish. Oddly, Vardaman changes the pronoun from “it,” as in “tomorrow it will be cooked and et,” to “she,” when he claims that “she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell” (*AILD* 43). A close reading of the sentence reveals “it” and “she” as referring to the fish and Addie, respectively. Then, Vardaman uses “him” in the place of “she”—as he says, “she will be him.” The “him” can be read as a personification of the fish, in which the fish is named with a human pronoun, again likening it to a human role, a role in which it can replace Addie in her absence. This classification again serves to relate the dead fish to his dead mother, in that it allows both to share in human qualities by partaking in human pronouns—he and she. And finally, we learn that Vardaman believes the fish will “be” part of pa and Cash and Dewey Dell—this assumption is odd but fair, assuming that pa, Cash and Dewey

Dell will eat the fish, thus construing it as “part” of them. The next time we hear from Vardaman, he has condensed his logic into “My mother is a fish” (*AILD* 54), which allows him to avoid the idea that his mother is “not” and instead compare her to an object that “is.” More generally, he is able to avoid distinguishing between categories—alive and dead—and instead is able to join like experiences—his perception of the fish and his perception of his mother. The mother, like the fish, is incorporated into the rest of the family. Again, distinctions are not natural to Vardaman's mode of thought. He operates on an understanding of similarities, not differences.

This complex thought process—and the brief, four-word version that follows several passages later—are telling of the nature of Vardaman's consciousness. Despite his flirtation with “is” and “is not,” Vardaman does not seem to be able to define his world in binary terms. In his lengthy comparison of the fish and his mother, Vardaman suggests that the body in the coffin is not his mother, but he eventually replaces his mother with the fish. He blurs the pronouns “he-she-it” and the divide between animal and human. In fact, Vardaman's logical-linguistic comparison is just as amalgamated as Benjy's sensory conglomerate; the difference is that words are available to Vardaman. Importantly, Vardaman concludes his thought process with “My mother is a fish,” an affirmative sentence with no trace of negation. And just as Benjy's wordless insight into Caddy's physical “contamination” in the mud becomes relevant to her sexual “contamination” later in *The Sound and the Fury*, so too does Vardaman's “My mother is a fish” statement resonate with the ensuing plot of *As I Lay Dying*: His mother actually becomes a “fish” in the sense that the Bundrens all try to catch her floating down the river after her coffin had tumbled out of the wagon. Thus, instead of attempting to divide his world into is and is not, Vardaman—at least for now—realizes that everything, including the dead, “is” in some sense of the

word. And like Benjy, Vardaman, too is able, through this affirmative insight, to speak to a sense of truth, in terms of the larger novel.

As Judith Lockyear explains in her essay “Communities of Language” in *Ordered by Words*, “Vardaman exists in the rudimentary stages of grasping the concept of metaphor ... Vardaman sets up a causal relationship between Addie and the fish that leads to his ultimate conclusion: 'My mother is a fish.' In that strange declaration, Vardaman realizes the abstraction of death through metaphor” (Lockyear 76). Lockyear argues that an understanding of metaphor requires a recognition “of the relational nature of reality” (Lockyear 76), which can also be described as sensory experience and memory. Benjy, we remember, has intuitive senses, but lacks a reliable memory and the ability to relate events that occur separately in time, and is thus incapable of the kind of metaphor that Vardaman achieves. In contrast, Vardaman's fish metaphor serves as a bridge between Benjy's entirely fluid, though solitary and idiosyncratic consciousness, and the relational nature allowed by a consciousness imbued with linguistic capabilities.

Faulkner's presentation of Vardaman as a thinker who tends to classify his world primarily in terms of the affirmative—in terms of “is,” rather than “is” versus “is-not,” aligns with the author's portrayal of distinctly synesthetic characters, and with the way synesthesia itself functions as a component of human consciousness. In *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*, Vardaman's and Benjy's synesthetic minds function as aggregates of thought and feeling, as fusion centers for both the senses and the sensibilities. The synesthetic consciousness is inherently a connective device, and Faulkner illustrates this aptly by endowing these two iconic synesthetes with both sensory synesthesia and a tendency to synthesize related experience. Just as Benjy, in a pivotal moment, combines his sister Caddy, trees and rain via smell, Vardaman

combines his mother and the fish through the observation that they are both dead. Neither Benjy's connection nor Vardaman's is overtly synesthetic; true synesthesia differs in that there is no explanation behind it, because the pairing is random. Nevertheless, both Benjy's and Vardaman's connective thinking illustrates the influence of synesthesia on a subject's mental landscape: a tendency toward connective thinking is a defining component. With synesthesia, and with sensory perceptions in general, there are no negations or clear oppositions. Thus, there is no binary yes/no relationship, but rather an affirmative one. Essentially, the way sensory pairings in the synesthetic brain work is entirely affirmation-based. The number 3 is blue, or the word "book" tastes sour. Sure, 3 also is not red, and "book" is not cotton-candy flavored, but the ultimate reason that 3 is not red is because 3 is blue, and the ultimate reason that "book" is not not cotton-candy flavored is because it is sour. The word "book" could just as easily be red, or cotton candy flavored; there is nothing to prevent these alternative perceptions. The point is that synesthesia arises from connection, from affirmation. And normal sensory experiences, too, are inherently defined by the affirmative: When we smell flowers, we register the smell of the flowers, not the not-smell of cheese. "Not" is unnatural to our immediate sensory experience, and certainly to synesthesia, because when we perceive our world, we do not perceive absence, but we perceive what is naturally available, without self-imposed logical distinctions that allow us to conceptualize absence or what is "not." What is natural to the human mode of thought is this ultimately undifferentiated way of thinking is the former, the mode of thought that both Benjy and Vardaman share.

Of course, we have already established that Vardaman's consciousness is further from the naturally amalgamated, purely sensory outlook that Benjy demonstrates, mainly because he uses language. In addition, Vardaman, because he can relate his feelings, can be specific and poignant.

He sees his mother not breathing and lying still; he sees the fish not breathing and lying still; therefore, his mother is a fish. This elementary logical syllogism only can be constructed through language, but its meaning is undergirded by sensory experience. Similarly, because “My mother is a fish” is ultimately an affirmation, we can read Vardaman as still possessing a natural, sensory-based consciousness sans division, at this point in the novel.

While language and logic allow Vardaman to explain his thoughts and experiences as more than just synesthetic or sensory connections, language also allows for the introduction of “not”—in other words, it allows for a binary means of classifying the world. With language, one can delineate categories and assign names. With language, division becomes possible. But does it become inevitable? It seems that the very way in which Faulkner answers this question provides the answer itself. In the later portions of *As I Lay Dying*, Vardaman is repeatedly forced to encounter iterations of a binary construct: When the Bundrens spend the night at Mosley and Armstid's home, after the disastrous incident in the river, Vardaman sneaks off at night to investigate where the vultures go after retiring each night when done following the wagon emitting the stench of Addie's rotting body. While Faulkner does not overtly explain what Vardaman sees when he sneaks out, Vardaman's insistent claims of “I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody”^{vii} (*AILD* 147) provides enough evidence to understand what he was forbidden to divulge. In a way, it's Benjy, Caddy and the mud puddle once again. More important, here Vardaman is boldly confronted with a contradiction that he must reconcile: the fact that he did see something, but must in a sense pretend that he did not. Thus, he must continue to remember that he did see his sister with her lover so he can act as if he did not. In this case, there is no easy sensory comparison or connection that Vardaman is able to make, as he does with his mother and the dead fish. Rather, he is forced to accept the contradiction of either

having seen Dewey Dell or not having seen her, and the rupture in his naturally fluid thinking causes a lingering damage—it reinforces the man-made idea of “not” that language allows, contrary to natural, perceptible experience. Evidently, Vardaman cannot cope with this, and continues to repeat that he “saw something” even into his next narrative section.

Furthermore, Vardaman's final commentary centers almost entirely on his grappling with the disappearance of his brother Darl, who is taken away to an asylum in Jackson after a breakdown. Vardaman seems to struggle with the idea that his brother goes crazy and went away, while nobody else in the family does:

He went to Jackson. 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. Darl . . . He had to get on the train to go to Jackson. I have not been on the train, but Darl has been on the train. Darl is my brother. Darl. Darl” (*AILD* 174-175).

First, Vardaman is overcome by the binary way of perceiving his world. This idea is new and shocking to him. He explains what has happened in terms of crazy versus not crazy; and riding on the train versus not riding. The structure and punctuation of his final phrase fades away, trending toward a sense of absence. For Vardaman, Darl's breakdown and consequent departure is what finally solidifies the idea of “not” for Vardaman. Darl himself creates a void in his absence, and a lasting conception of “is not” bifurcates Vardaman's once-fluid consciousness. Interestingly, however, Vardaman's final section ends with broken narration, but his final words indicate that Vardaman's storytelling method is not broken into a discrete beginning, middle and end. Just as he begins his narration *en medias res*, he ends without punctuation or even a full sentence. His narrative trails off with the open-ended repetition of “Darl,” leaving us wondering what Faulkner's youngest Bundren might say next. Throughout this entire section, then, Vardaman focuses on the idea of separation, bifurcation and division, his narration ends just as

non-discretely and just as continuously as it begins, indicating that even when bifurcation and division subsume his consciousness, he eventually retreats into a dialectical understanding without divisions, one that theoretically hangs in limbo into the novel's eternity.

Vardaman's struggle to deal with these challenges to his consciousness remains just that, a struggle; his brother, Darl, however, collapses into insanity and loses his sense of self when faced with similar trials. This loss is arguably brought about by his attempt throughout the course of the novel to maintain control over his family by narrating them—by inhabiting their perspectives. However, to demonstrate that such control is impossible, Faulkner represents Darl as ultimately not being able to inhabit even his own perspective, let alone others'. Unlike Vardaman, Darl is critical, cruel and sarcastic. He has a sharp eye and tongue, and has arguably the tightest grasp on language of all the Bundrens. The only thing he seems to share with Vardaman is the capacity for synesthetic perception, though he does not experience synesthesia nearly as intensely or as frequently as does his younger brother.

Darl's command of language is nothing short of stunning. As the family stands by Addie's bedside, admiring their mother in death, Darl describes Anse's stature with poetic elegance: “Pa leans above the bed in the twilight, his humped silhouette partaking of that owl-like quality of awry-feathered, disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought” (*AILD* 31). Darl's characterization of his father not only demonstrates his aptitude for language, but also indicates that he tends to narrate with the assumption that he can enter another's perspective. Unlike Vardaman, whose storytelling consists of descriptions and abstractions built from sensory observations, Darl uses language to narrate what he believes others are thinking. In this case, he envisions his father as experiencing outrage and wisdom, and the strength of Darl's description indicates that he believes he knows what Anse is thinking.

Darl narrates all his family members' secrets with this same sense of knowing. He accuses his sister Dewey Dell of wanting their mother to die so she can “get to town” to have an abortion. Darl makes clear his knowledge of Dewey Dell's pregnancy:

She wouldn't say what we both knew. 'The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true^{viii}: is that it? But you know it is true now. I can almost tell you the day when you knew it was true. Why won't you say it, even to your self?' She will not say it. She just keeps saying 'Are you going to tell pa? Are you going to kill him?' (*AILD* 25).

Here Darl speaks for his sister, telling the secret that is hers to admit. As Darl indicates, they “both knew” the same fact—that Dewey Dell is pregnant; and because Darl “knows” the secret that occupies Dewey Dell's mind, he shares in her perspective, or at least presumes to do so. The pregnancy is Dewey Dell's secret, not Darl's, but Darl's knowledge of it—and his decision to take ownership of it through narrating his sister's plight—make it his as well. And Darl even tells Dewey Dell why she will not admit her secret, even to herself. When Darl assumes that Dewey Dell believes that saying that she is pregnant will make it more true, or at least more resonant, he empowers language as a tool for constructing his world. Of course, Darl does not understand why Dewey Dell will not use language to affirm her pregnancy, even though she knows “it is true now.” Dewey Dell physically experiences the pregnancy, but Darl grants himself ownership of Dewey Dell's secret by creating his own perspective on it, albeit a fabricated one; in other words, he uses language to construct his sister's experience for himself, and to share it with the reader.

In a similar fashion, Darl spends an entire section narrating Jewel's secret about how he spent one summer working Mr. Quick's fields to buy a horse. Darl and Cash suspected that their brother was sneaking out at night to have an affair with a local woman, while Addie and Anse thought his fatigue during the day was due to an illness. Cash follows Jewel one night and Darl

explains that he “knew [Cash] knew what it was” that Jewel was doing each night (AILD 86).

When Jewel finally brings home the horse he has worked for, Addie becomes so upset that, through reading her emotion, Darl learns an even deeper secret about his brother:

That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where [Jewel] was sleeping, in the dark. She cried hard, maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears that she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to. And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day (AILD 88-89).

At this point Darl discovers that Jewel has a different father than all the other Bundren children. Just as he earlier endows Anse with outrage and wisdom and intuits Dewey Dell's pregnancy, Darl now characterizes Addie as full of shame and deceit. And as he does with the others, Darl affixes a specific meaning to the emotion he attributes to his mother: he assumes that Jewel is the product of Addie's deceit. And he compares Addie's/Jewel's secret to Dewey Dell's. They are, in a sense, two versions of the same kind of secret. Interestingly, Darl comes to these realizations without words. Essentially, he tries to replace sensation with words. Instead, he merely observes, he simply watches his sister's and his mother's behaviors. Darl, too, is right to assume that Dewey Dell is pregnant—when he calls her bluff, her nervous reaction says it all, even though Dewey Dell does not admit to her brother with words, that she is carrying a child. And Darl is right to assume that Jewel has a different father because, as Addie later tells us, such is the case. He is right to claim that Jewel's mother is a horse—Jewel has shown us where his loyalties and affections lie. Of course the correctness of Darl's narration matters naught; Faulkner still seems to indicate that Darl's efforts to inhabit and narrate others' secrets—others perspectives—is unsustainable and unhealthy.

In *As I Lay Dying* Faulkner makes it clear that language is of course a necessary aspect of communication, but he also elucidates the dangers of relying on language as an objective means

of characterizing the world. He demonstrates that language can establish shared meaning, but also that language as a system of communication is often unsuccessful in overcoming individual perspective and cannot be used as a substitute for, or a caution against, the idiosyncratic tendencies of the individual human mind. Although Darl is given more narrative sections than any other character—his voice has the most narrative weight, in a sense—Faulkner makes it clear that Darl relies on language as a crutch upon which to support his own insecurities. He is jealous that Addie has shown Jewel more affection, and Darl seems to fill the emotional void with words. He often uses words to tell secrets and to narrate in place of others, to occupy perspectives that are not truly his. For instance, he taunts Jewel by repeatedly asking who his father is, and he harasses Dewey Dell about her pregnancy. And, in a poignant display of his insecurity, mental fragility and his need to take refuge in language, Darl even tries to confound Vardaman with his own version of a language game (in a dialogue narrated by Vardaman):

“Jewel’s mother is a horse,” Darl said.

“Then mine can be a fish, can’t it, Darl?” I said.

Jewel is my brother.

“Then mine will have to be a horse too,” I said.

“Why?” Darl said. “If pa is your pa, why does your ma have to be a horse, just because Jewel’s is?”

“Why does it?” I said. “Why does it, Darl?”

Darl is my brother.

“Then what is your ma, Darl?” I said.

“I haven’t got ere one,” Darl said. “Because if I had one, it is was. And if it is was, it can’t be is. Can it?”

“No,” I said.

I am. Darl is my brother.

“But you are, Darl,” I said.

“I know it,” Darl said. “That’s why I am not is. Are is too many for one woman to foal.”

Darl's insinuation is too deep, too nuanced and too laden with sarcasm for the young Vardaman to understand. When Darl claims that Jewel's mother is a horse, he means that Jewel shows more affection to his horse than he ever did to his mother. Vardaman, however, operates primarily on lived sensory experience, not poetic metaphor or complex analogy, and assumes that because a fish is an animal like a horse is an animal, Darl's mother can be a horse. (We already know the origin of the fish statement.) He then realizes that because he and Jewel are brothers, they must have the same mother, so his mother also must be a horse. Darl, on the other hand, is too caught up in the argument he has constructed, and he does not understand why Vardaman would need his mother to be a horse if he is not an illegitimate child, like Jewel. Naturally Vardaman does not understand the concept of illegitimacy. When Vardaman asks Darl what his mother is (assuming that Vardaman now thinks all the Bundrens have different animals as mothers), Darl responds that he does not have a mother because his mother is "was" (meaning she is dead) and was cannot be is (dead cannot be alive). This is, as we've seen, exactly the concept that Vardaman struggles with earlier; for him, differentiating states such as life and death is difficult and unnatural. Vardaman protests that his brother does exist ("But you are, Darl") and Darl mistakenly takes "are" as both a direct identification of himself and an indication that, being more than one, or plural, as "are" denotes, means that in no way could he have been born with a horse as a mother, because multiple births would have been impossible. It seems that by this point, Vardaman is lost, and moves on. But what lasts is Darl's fascinating conception of "are." He refers to himself in the plural, or at least accepts such a representation to make his rather lame syllogism retain a modicum meaning. Yet Darl is indeed "are," or at least he tries to be. Throughout the course of the novel, he attempts to be Dewey Dell, Jewel, Anse and Addie. He

trails others closely, narrates in their stead and literally puts words into their mouths. Put simply, he tries to occupy perspectives that are not his own.

Darl's language game, although comprised of a false syllogism, is significant “as the manifestation of the verbal nature of Darl's mind,” writes Lockyear. “For him, the self and its relation to others exist when he can put them into words. His exchange with Vardaman allows him to flex his verbal muscles, and by making articulation a game, Darl asserts his own control over the words that he so depends on” (Lockyear 77). Darl's desire to dominate or fix reality with language is his ultimate demise. He suffers from a *false* sense of objectivity and control, and his efforts do not allow him to truly or objectively enter others' perspectives; instead he ends up dissociating from himself, as evidenced by his removal to the asylum by the end of the novel. Of course, escape from his own perspective via language is impossible: “Language will not allow him to control events because he is also living the story he is telling,” Lockyear explains (Lockyear 81). Darl's tragic flaw is the assumption that he can acquire an objectively true perspective. In fact, he informs us that he believes he has done so earlier in the novel: When he sees Addie crying over Jewel just after he buys the horse, Darl claims of Addie and Jewel's secret, “And then I knew that I knew” (*AILD* 89). The importance here is not that Darl is correct in what he surmises about his family, but that he “knew that he knew”—that he is confident that he has objective, second-order knowledge.^{ix} In that moment, especially, Darl marks himself for metaphysical failure.

When Darl uses language to narrate others' perspectives, he conveniently omits opportunities for his own character's development. He acts as a commentator on life outside himself—on others' thoughts and feelings and meaning of actions—but ignores his own. This neglect is most evident between the moment when Darl demands who Jewel's father is and when

he is sent to the mental asylum in Jackson. The break between his normal first-person narration and the third-person monologue that Darl gives in his final section is so stark that it only makes sense that he—who tells all and then some when others are concerned—is withholding relevant plot information. What happens between Darl's late sections and his final one? Cash gives us the answer: Darl has attempted to burn down Gillespie's barn the night that the Bundren family stays with him, the night that Addie's coffin is left out in the barn. Darl himself narrates this scene, but leaves out the fact that he set the barn aflame: “[Gillespie] pauses at the coffin, stooping, looking at me, his face furious. Overhead the flames sound like thunder . . . 'Quick,' I say; 'the horses.' He glares a moment longer at me...” (*AILD* 150). Perhaps this is enough evidence, but later we discover for sure why Gillespie eyes Darl critically. Cash tells us in his final section that the family sends Darl to a mental institution after Gillespie declares him crazy for burning his barn. Darl, it seems, has been so concerned with inhabiting others' perspectives and holding others' secrets that he does not keep a close enough watch on what others think of him. “I thought you would have told me,” he pleads. “I never thought you would have” (*AILD* 164). Darl is surprised at his, for once, lack of knowledge. He does not expect to be controlled by others' insights into him, but instead to be the one in control. Darl fails to pay attention to himself, to his own perspective, to his feelings, to the meaning of his actions and to how others understand them. Instead he tries to control others by speaking for them. What Darl's downfall demonstrates is that presuming to understand and be in control of everything is impossible, and ultimately will lead to failure. Darl's attempt to inhabit multiple perspectives and to assume an objective narrative voice results in his undoing: He spreads himself thin in attempt to be more than he can; the act of narrating for others divides him into pieces so that as a self he is no longer whole. He is “are.” But, of course, the idea of an individual being an “are,” or attaining a universal, omniscient

perspective, as Darl attempts, is impossible. Faulkner predicts the end of such mental over-extension: In his final section, Darl is cast as a narrative ghost, an individual who is no longer, a shell of a consciousness who has no sense of self and can now only objectify himself, as he has others. Fittingly, he speaks in the third person:

Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. 'What are you laughing at?' I said. 'Yes yes yes yes yes.' ... They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh. One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money has a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money, which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I know what that is. Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face I know what that is. 'Is that why you are laughing, Darl?' 'Yes yes yes yes yes yes' ... 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' (*AILD* 176-177).

Ironically, after an entire novel of using language to divide and categorize his world, to confuse others and parse out perspectives, of essentially manifesting the concept of “not” via words (Anse is *not* Jewel's father, I do not have a mother, Addie is *not* alive), burning down the barn to make it (and Addie's body) *not* exist, and conveniently neglecting to narrate his attempted arson, Darl's last word is “yes.” Perhaps he learns something once behind bars. It seems that Faulkner allows him to utter a warning: separation and bifurcation are not natural, what is true is what is brought together, synthesized or “synesthetized.” As he sits on the train, Darl inundates us with imagery of combination and conjunction, images to which he is suddenly hyper-aware. For example, the men who have come to take him away pull together two chairs and are sitting face to face. This image reminds Darl of the “incestuous” existence of the state's money, which he reasons is paying for the train ride and his ensuing internment. “A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back” (*AILD* 176), he claims, indicating that,

like the two men who face inward, the nickel has two faces (or two positive sides, or heads) and no back (or no negative sides, or tails). Here Darl perceives no negation. And even in the case of his wartime spyglass from France, which has in it “a woman and a pig with two backs and no face,” the binary relationship between face/back and yes/no is again disrupted.

Faulkner's twist on the image of the beast with two backs is profound, both for Darl and for the novel as a whole. Darl seems to realize, through his resounding “yes” at the close of his final section, that what is natural to human sensation, observation and, by extension, consciousness, is a “yes,” a positive relationship in which the mind makes connections fluidly rather than tears them apart, a “yes” that permeates the idiosyncratic, individual, relativistic, perhaps synesthetic perspective. Through a synesthetic understanding, only positive relationships can be made, since ultimately nothing can be disproved, negated or refuted objectively. Thus, synesthesia itself is a beast with two backs—it presents an unexplainable yet intrinsic relationship between two apparently unrelated entities; it presents a relationship that defies logic and definition, but one that makes sense within the idiosyncratic confines of an individual's subjective consciousness. Darl's closing statements hint at this realization: after a novel spent using language to bifurcate his and others' worlds, he is all for communion, reconciliation, synthesis. What Darl seems to miss, throughout the novel, is that language is but a tool for communication, not an objective means of classifying or dividing the world. Lockyear explains in “Communities of Language” that while the other narrators use words to “participate in dialogue,” Darl instead:

gradually sees everything as the product of his own articulation,” and “as the novel progresses, Darl's early detachment, which is common to narrators, grows into total separation from everything, even himself ... ultimately his language will not allow him to control events because he is also living the story he is telling. Once he removes himself, he can be objective, but that means the dissolution of himself (Lockyear 80).

Thus, he cannot simultaneously exist and exist outside his own subjective perspective.

Interestingly, Darl's demise leads to Cash's evolution as a narrator; Faulkner's text reminds the reader what language is in fact for: Cash is non-synesthetic and practical to no end. "From the start, Cash is solely a creature of the material world, and language is just another tool to facilitate the completion of a task" (Lockyear 81). A carpenter, he narrates his first section by describing why he has beveled the edges of Addie's coffin. In a sense, Cash's usage of language as a tool rather than an objective measure redeems us from Darl's grandiose quest to control his world. For Cash, language is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is man-made, but also merely a carpenter's tool. "The effect is to place a higher value on language as exchange than on the word as absolute" (Lockyear 84-85). This reading makes sense, considering Faulkner's consistent emphasis on viewing life and existence as a dialectical or synesthetic relationship instead of a binary or dichotomized one. The author seems to speak, ironically, through the dead Addie Bundren, who ought to be wordless and verbally impotent, of the futility of words:

... I had been used to words for a long time ... Sometimes I would lie by [Anse] in the dark, hearing he land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar ... And 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 ... it doesn't matter what they call them. And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same per son to straddle from one to the other (*AILD* 115-119).

Addie manages to articulate the resonance of *As I Lay Dying* in several pages, in words that, ironically, she would likely believe are futile. Besides describing the relative impotence of

language, Addie's passage also indicates her synesthetic perception and how it trumps the feeble words that others use. The most illustrative examples are Addie's claims that Cora Tull's judgmental words "go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless," while "terribly doing" clings to the earth. For Addie, actions speak louder than words, and are more tangible and meaningful than mere language. Similarly, Addie's ability to "hear" the land and "see" the name "Anse" in the shape of a vessel that oozes cold molasses wield more descriptive power as sensations than does language as an explanation. Addie, more than any other Bundren, demonstrates that language is clearly secondary to lived sensory experience. In Addie's case, her synesthesia marks a consciousness that is self-aware in its inherent subjectivity, and by extension aware of the often futility of words, which tend to shallowly classify life in terms of divisions and imposed categories. Paradoxically, it is the dead woman who realizes that life does not fit into a box.

For the Bundrens, life indeed spills out of the box. The coffin cannot contain Addie, who, in narrative terms, is less dead than we think. Words cannot contain meaning. Darl cannot contain all with his language, and a "cage" in the asylum cannot contain his final, warning revelation. While the idea of differentiation and division—especially between life and death—is still too foreign for Vardaman's young and innocent consciousness, Darl's facility with language allows him to construct a pseudo-objective world of his own, a world in which he employs words to control, taunt and harass others. This of course is precisely what his dead mother cautions against in her single narrative section. Vardaman does not experience the same collapse as does Darl, because he never thinks to try to escape his perspective. Arguably Darl's mode of thinking—of realizing that other perspectives beyond his own exist—is beyond Vardaman's simple ways. The connections that Vardaman makes are about what he observes, not what others think, just as

synesthesia is about what one's particular idiosyncratic pairings are, not about what “objective” reality looks like to others. In a sense Faulkner expands his early use of synesthesia (as in *The Sound and the Fury*) in *As I Lay Dying*. He casts synesthesia as the basis of pairing, especially the basis of idiosyncratic pairing and of the inherent idiosyncratic nature of the individual perspective. The novel about the dead woman is paradoxically creative and full of life. It seems to refute the idea of a discrete end, and perhaps of a distinct beginning, as well. In the final scene, Anse introduces his new wife to the four remaining children, indicating that the cycle that just took place could very well repeat itself. Even time is indivisible, unbreakable and intangible. Perhaps the Bundrens are too simple to contemplate the relevance and power of time. Instead, it is Faulkner's Harvard boy, Quentin Compson, whose relationship to the temporal convinces him, quite dangerously, that he can escape his own place in time and perspective.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
“Feeling Noon” and Missing Twilight:
How Quentin's Escape is Ultimately a Trap**

Quentin Compson's obsession with time in *The Sound and the Fury* is quite like Darl's absorption in language, especially in that both experience dissociative states as a result of a close, synesthetic relationship with language and time, respectively. In Darl's case, dissociation manifests as insanity, while Quentin's dissociation from himself ultimately results in suicide, a solution which he believes will finally allow him to escape the grasp of time, which he "feels" constantly, in an emotional and moral sense as well as a synesthetic one.

Quentin's ability to hear and feel time is suggestive. As arguably the most intelligent and introspective of the Compson children, Quentin's consciousness is built of a complicated entanglement between reality and his own imagination. Fittingly, his relationship with time is nuanced: It is both naturally synesthetic and logical. This relationship with time involves his physical ability to understand time by hearing and feeling time, through his ticking watch, which allows him to logically interpret its presence; but at the same time Quentin's conception of time takes on a synesthetic tone that can also be read as stimulating a synesthetic connection to sound, touch and even spatial location.

In his opening paragraph, Quentin's dually logical-intuitive relationship with time is immediately apparent: "When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch" (*TSATF* 76). Quentin logically infers that the positioning of the shadow on the curtain indicates a certain time of day, but he also notes that he "was in time again," indicating his spatial perception of time as something he can exist within or outside of. The idea that Quentin feels he can, at times at least, exist outside of time is also relevant and telling; it foreshadows his desire to escape time and the constraints it imposes on his consciousness.

Immediately following this admission, Quentin continues on to give a lengthy explanation of the origin and meaning of his pocket watch:

It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciating-ly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought (*TSATF* 76).

The watch, symbolically, is passed down to Quentin from his father and grandfather, just as are family history, memories, mistakes, accomplishments, class and race. We are inherently tied to our pasts. Quentin is rooted in time by his ancestry—but also by his own actions within his own lifetime. Quentin's father describes the watch—and really, time—as essentially the container, even the reliquary, of all “hope and desire,” and explains to Quentin that time functions to dilute, mask or shroud the importance of hopes and desires, and that over time, nothing truly matters, not Quentin's desires, nor his father's, nor his grandfather's, nor anyone's. In his nihilistic determinism, Quentin's father seems to urge his son to forget time, to regard it as something that cannot be touched, let alone conquered, something that cannot be fought, let alone defeated.

But despite Mr. Compson's warnings against the predaciousness of time, Quentin's narration indicates that the young Harvard student does touch time, and is very touched by it as well. Mr. Compson's disconnect from the temporal is the opposite of his son's relationship to time, and especially to the heaviness of time as something that cannot be lifted, reoriented or reversed, as something that locks him in place. For instance, Quentin, as he sits and observes the clock strike, and watches a sparrow sit on a ledge and then fly away, is clearly burdened by the weight of his contemplations. “It was a while before the last stroke ceased vibrating. It stayed in the air, more felt than heard, for a long time,” Quentin observes. Just lines later, he begins to think of his own past, especially of his family and particularly his sister Caddy: “Because if it

were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. *I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames*” (TSATF 79). Quentin's worry about his and his sister's sexuality is the prime driving force behind his anxious preoccupation with time: time cannot be reversed and thus neither can Caddy be virginal, nor her pregnancy be undone. Here Quentin wishes for eternal damnation, if only it can be shared with the sister whom he loves. Interestingly, eternity symbolizes a conclusion. Quentin's wish would come true in hell; there time would disappear, lose its relevance, dissolve into eternity. Quentin wishes that it were he, rather than Dalton Ames, who took Caddy's virginity and impregnated her, and he envisions telling his father this story. Like Benjy, Quentin also reviles the idea of his sister as anything other than sexually pure. The idea of a broken, unvirginal Caddy repulses him, and paradoxically incest is Quentin's way of envisioning his sister as still unbroken—as not having found love outside the family unit and as still remaining part of the Compson line, and only the Compson line. Quentin's distorted love for his sister allows him to idealize incest and wish that, in their sinful act, the two would be able to live a “timeless” existence together, alone in the worst recess of hell.

It is important to understand Quentin's incestuous fantasy for what it represents—a desire to hold fast to what he knows, to not break the boundaries with which he has grown up. These boundaries—familial, socio-moral and perceptual—are what regulate Quentin's perspective. His family is insular, his social and moral codes align with those of the proverbial southern male of his generation and status (hence his revulsion at Caddy's sexual uninhibitedness and his own virginity), and his synesthesia is wrapped tightly around time and its fixity. And thus, when his sister breaks away from the Compson gentility, when his father turns a blind eye to her actions

and tells Quentin that time cannot be grasped, Quentin cannot avoid an existential crisis of sorts. Thus, incest with Caddy is a fantasy that occupies the chasm—it allows him to imagine her re-introduction to the family; it takes care of his own virginity while preserving hers from a leering outsider and, in re-writing Caddy's sexual history, Quentin feigns the control over time he so desperately desires.

This desire for control is painfully evident during Quentin's trip to have his watch repaired. He enters the watch shop and immediately attempts to balance the overwhelming sense of time's pressure upon him with an attempt to demonstrate to the watch shop owner that he can control time more than time controls him:

The place was full of ticking, like crickets in September grass, and I could hear a big clock on the wall above his head. He looked up, his eye big and blurred and rushing beyond the glass. I took mine out and handed it to him.

“I broke my watch.”

He flipped it over in his hand. “I should say you have. You must have stepped on it.”

“Yes, sir. I knocked it off the dresser and stepped on it in the dark. It's still running though.”

He pried the back open and squinted into it. “Seems to be all right. I cant tell until I go over it, though. I'll go into it this afternoon.”

“I'll bring it back later,” I said. “Would you mind telling me if any of those watches in the window are right?”

He held my watch on his palm and looked up at me with his blurred rushing eye.

“I made a bet with a fellow,” I said. “And I forgot my glasses this morning.”

“Why, all right,” he said. He laid the watch down and half rose on his stool and looked over the barrier. Then he glanced up at the wall. “It's twen-”

“Don't tell me,” I said, “please, sir. Just tell me if any of them are right.”

...

“No. But they haven't been regulated and set yet. If you're thinking of buying one of them-”

“No, sir. I don't need a watch. We have a clock in our sitting room. I'll have this one fixed when I do” (*TSATF* 83).

The dialogue between Quentin and the watch shop owner illustrates Quentin's intense desire to control time, as represented by his continued efforts—whether conscious or subconscious—to

demonstrate to the shop owner that he knows more about watches and clocks than most. In a feeble attempt to grasp control over the situation, Quentin tells the shop owner that, although his watch is broken, “it’s still running.” When the shop owner tells Quentin that he will be able to take a better look at the timepiece later in the afternoon, Quentin is determined not to leave his watch—his time—in the hands of the stranger, and instead decides to “bring it back later.” Then he asks the watch shop owner to tell him if any of the clocks on the wall are right, arguably another attempt at demonstrating to the shop owner—the keeper of time—that he himself wields a sharp intuition into—and thus control over—time. And when the shop owner asks him if he would like to purchase one of the clocks once they are reset, Quentin asserts to the man that already has his own clock in his sitting room—in other words, he already has a handle on time, and is in no need of any assistance. Of course, Quentin is captive to time from the start. After all, the reason he visits the shop is because he has broken his watch, unintentionally—and inconveniently—not as a demonstration of his command over time.

When he leaves the shop, Quentin seems to develop an awareness of the extremely relativistic “reducto absurdum of all human experience” of which his father has warned him:

I went out, shutting the door upon the ticking. I looked back into the window ... There were about a dozen watches in the window, a dozen different hours and each with the same assertive and contradictory assurance that mine had, without any hands at all. Contradicting one another. I could hear mine, ticking away inside my pocket, even though nobody could see it, even though it could tell nothing if anyone could (*TSATF* 85).

Quentin effectively “shuts the door” on time. Of course, such is an extremely nuanced action in his case. He can be read as refusing to acknowledge time itself, of trying to escape it by ignoring it, which seems to line up with his father's suggested approach to life. Conversely, Quentin could also be read here as rooting himself even more resolutely within time, within his own time, while

simultaneously coming to understand that his own time, his own experience and perspective, is just as “assertive and contradictory” as anyone else's, and thus just as subjective. While the first reading of Quentin's thoughts seems plausible, especially given the advice of his father, the second reading makes ample use of both Quentin's tendency to rebel, to be a loner, *and* what seems to be Faulkner's larger plan for Quentin's untimely downfall.^x “[Father] said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life” recalls Quentin shortly after leaving the shop (*TSATF* 85). Thus, he does take into account his Father's warning about investing too much in time, but Quentin's first tragic flaw is that he believes that by abandoning his timepiece he effectively gives up his obsession with time. Quentin mistakenly assumes that he can *choose* to give up his connection with time, though he cannot, just as one cannot choose to give up the innate sensory connections that occur with synesthesia, or even with any individual consciousness. Additionally, his father's advice is flawed to begin with: One cannot ever truly disregard time, as history comes to envelop all existence. Mr. Compson's advice is impossible to fulfill, just as is escape from one's time, personal history, or perspective. Essentially, Quentin comes to wrongly believe that once he has accepted the brokenness of his timepiece, he has broken time's control over him. Of course, time is ever-present, not just contained within the arbitrary measurements of a watch. Again, Quentin's flaw is that he is wrong to assume that he has contained time in the watch. As we can see, he has not. Quentin continues to “feel” time synesthetically, without the device. And despite his assumption that his perceptual connection to time is one under his control, he still exists “in” the uncontrollable, inescapable framework of the temporal.

Quentin's continuing narrative indicates how, after he leaves the watch shop, he increasingly begins to operate under the assumption that he is able to control and manipulate the flow of time:

After a while I had been hearing my watch for some time and I could feel the letters crackle through my coat, against the railing, and I leaned on the railing, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it. I moved along the rail, but my suit was dark too and I could wipe my hands, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it. I walked it into the shadow of the quai. Then I went east (*TSATF* 92).

Quentin hears his watch, but seems to disregard it and instead observe his shadow, and how he manages to “trick” it. However, the shadow still serves as a reference to time, albeit a less direct one, and his preoccupation with time persists through his fascination with tricking his shadow. “In Precarious Coherence: Objects through Time,” an essay in the volume *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Sound and the Fury*, Gail L. Mortimer writes that “Quentin’s shadow is important because it shows us his preoccupation with control” and “threatens him with a loss of his sense of himself^{xi} ... [Quentin is only able to react to [the shadow’s] flowing by asserting rigidity and control, by successfully 'tricking' it. Mortimer continues, “It is clear, though, that his shadow, as part of his surface, evades definition and management. It preserves its essential fluidity and, in doing so, serves as an appropriate focus for Quentin’s absorption with the existence and potential annihilation of his own identity” (Mortimer 108-109). Later Quentin claims that he “walked upon the belly of my shadow. I could extend my hand beyond it,” he says (*TSATF* 96). Here Quentin's observation indicates not only that he continues to experiment with controlling time by symbolically walking over his shadow, but also that he is beginning to experiment with self-destruction. Currently, the victim is his mere shadow, but later, we learn that Quentin takes his own life.

Arguably his suicide is the extension of continued experimentation with the notion of time travel, of attempting to outrun time, to one-up his own death, so as to gain control over time's persistent grip on his existence. We would expect Quentin to desire to go back in time, especially to rewrite Caddy's and his own sexual history. But he may very likely have given up on the quest to reverse time, and, misinterpreting his father's advice, chosen instead to try to outrun time, to outrun his own time by outrunning his own life. In the narrative that follows, Faulkner paints a vivid picture of Quentin in his attempts to stretch himself beyond the present moment. "You can feel noon," Quentin says, "You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity" (*TSATF* 104). By making here an observation about his own synesthetic relationship to time, Quentin indicates that for him, both synesthesia and time are inescapable. Through Quentin's narration, Faulkner portrays time as an object of physicality and gravity. And the irony of time as a tangible object is certainly not lost: time is both ever-present and ungraspable, and thus it is unstoppable. Quentin, too, is unstoppable in his false perception that he can outrun time: "I began to feel the water before I came to the bridge" (*TSATF* 115) he claims before he walks home from the day's errands, again interpreting time as something that he can physically reach beyond. Fascinatingly, Quentin does manage time travel to the past, in the form of flashback. And fittingly, although he cannot change the outcome of Caddy's encounter with Dalton Ames, he does at least revisit the time following their interaction. As he stands on the bridge, overlooking the water, Quentin recalls his past, reliving the moments following his fight with Dalton Ames:

As I descended the light dwindled slowly, yet at the same time without altering its quality, as if I and not light were changing, decreasing ... After the lane the light seemed brighter, as though I had walked through night in the lane and come out into morning again. Pretty soon the car came ... When we ran out of the trees I could see the twilight again, that quality of light as if time really had stopped for a while, with the sun hanging just under the horizon (*TSATF* 169).

Quentin revises the memory itself, making it one of time travel: he can alternate between morning and night simply by walking and driving, almost effortlessly. And by the end of the passage, he even manages to stop time, or at least perceive and narrate time as having stopped. He effectually revises the moment of confrontation between himself and Caddy's lover so it reflects the potentiality of time travel, rather than the concrete, actualized, immovable past.

At the same time, of course, both time and synesthesia are non-discrete. From moment to moment, from sensation to sensation, both are blurred across human experience; both break boundaries. Synesthesia is a stark example of a disruption of traditional sensory and perceptual boundaries, and time, especially as it is characterized in the novel, is fluid: flashbacks and memories permeate the prose. Mortimer explains Faulkner's use of synesthesia to enhance the blurring effect in Quentin's narration:

“The effect [Faulkner] achieves by crossing these conceptual boundaries is the heightened intensity of the perception itself and a more convincing sense of experience, of reality. Each perception seems to be suspended among the possibilities implied by the multiple modes of perception that interact to reveal it, rather than being confined by a neat and finite correlation between the sense and the object perceived (Mortimer 109-110).

Thus, Faulkner seems to suggest that actual reality *is* blurred, across perspectives, perception and time, even within the individual's perspective, perception and chronology. Experience is fluid in that it is relative to the individual, but of course, the individual cannot escape his own experience. For Quentin, this lesson is anything but simple. In the above passage, when Quentin mentions twilight, it is as if he grasps –and then neglects–the lesson that Faulkner has in store for him. Twilight itself is a liminal connection between day and night, the link that transforms a binary into a dialectic, and Quentin simply misses the opportunity to embody it by driving away.

Mortimer again speaks to Quentin's struggle, this time with the communicative ambiguity of twilight in mind:

Twilight, which dominates this passage, is a recurring and important symbol in Faulkner's stories. Compressed into this one concept are many of the implications of his thoughts about transience and the nature of the lived moment. It suggests exactly the precarious coherence that characterizes the universe Quentin perceives, and *Twilight* was, in fact, the original title of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Especially insofar as it presents a descriptive problem, twilight expresses the diffusion of qualities and imperfect clarity that are characteristic of the surfaces of objects in Faulkner's fictive world. The moment of twilight is at once intense and indeterminate. Visually, it is a fusion of light and dark, of white and black. Its essential feature is the flowing that carries it so quickly away ... (Mortimer 113).

Similarly, the water of the river that Quentin “feels” before he approaches it is the same water in which he ultimately drowns himself at the end of his section. He throws himself into the selfsame abyss, which he thought he could physically “touch” before he arrived at it in time. He throws himself into death—the end of his time—before it can claim him, in an attempt to outrun time. Quentin ultimately misinterprets his father's advice. Perhaps ignoring time would have been possible, to a degree, but Quentin assumes that he will only be able to ignore time—and history—if he is able to outrun it. Discouraged by the disconnect between his own entrenched social and moral views about family, sexuality and the reality of his sister's actions, Quentin reflects on his father's suggestion that, essentially, nothing matters, and time is the ultimate, inevitable equalizer that melts the relevance of individual experience into a collective nihilism. What he takes from his father's philosophy is that the temporal structure is something that must be left behind. Quentin cannot stand to exist feebly and apathetically within time; instead he races time to his own death.

Ironically, Quentin loses himself, through his death, in a current of ambiguity and fluidity (the river), after a lifetime of failing to grasp the kind of metaphysical dialectic or non-division that would have made his existence more bearable. Like Darl, whose bittersweet end involves a

dissociation from himself after pages of attempted robbery of others' perspectives, Quentin's death teaches a similar lesson: if you try to control the flow of time, you'll be swept away by it. Quentin experiences a synesthetic relationship to time, intuiting time as something tangible and felt. His temporal synesthesia is in part what convinces Quentin that, given such a closeness to time, he is able to overcome it. His father's words, as well, urge him in this direction, though it seems that Quentin never fully grasps what Mr. Compson means. For Quentin, his father's notion that ignorance of time provides bliss is impossible. He cannot become ignorant of time, just as he cannot return to his own history. Quentin instead chooses to outrun his future. Moreover, he abhors the blurring and equating—as his father's nihilism suggests—of his personal social and moral world with that of the entire human race. He abhors relativism, whenever it creeps in, as it does toward the close of the novel, blatantly and with vehemence. Quentin seems to recall lying awake and thinking of the “sad” smell of honeysuckle:

I could put myself to sleep saying that over and over until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolise night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray halfnight where all stable things had become shadow paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible from antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who (*TSATF* 170).

He envisions, almost in nightmarish fashion, the distinct sadness of honeysuckle mixing and blurring with other thoughts and sensations until “the whole thing came to symbolize night and unrest,” or in other words, the chaos of both his mind and the familial and moral instability that surround him. In the passage he understands himself to exist in limbo, “neither asleep nor awake,” within a gray area “where all stable things had become shadow paradoxical.” Yes, relativism strikes. “I was I was not who was not was not who,” Quentin concludes, sounding characteristically like Darl in his final “yes yes yes...” moment. While Darl realizes that the

answer is “yes,” that it is useless to divide the world into a feeble and fragmentary “is” and “is not” binary, Quentin is haunted by the idea that he is not who he is—that his morals, history and perspective are just his, and are in the grand scheme of time are not as significant as he imagines them to be. At the same time, he can be nobody else. He ultimately decides that a life in limbo between an unavoidable relativistic isolation *and* an unavoidable boundary-breaking disintegration is not worth living. Like Darl, he struggles in that he cannot create successfully objective boundaries that define his world. But at the same time, neither can he (or Darl) throw off his own idiosyncratic perspective—synesthetic or otherwise—to inhabit another perspective—whether that of another person or that of another time, or that of an objective observer. Clearly any attempts to do so will yield a loss of self. Darl seems to finally understand this, albeit after he has been committed to the asylum. And while Quentin seems to finally grasp Faulkner's relativistic message, he apparently has already decided to kill himself. Whether Quentin—or time—has the last laugh is debatable. There is no clear winner; perhaps there is no clear battle, as Mr. Compson has supposed. But Faulkner makes it clear that an attempt to revise history or outrun the future, just like an attempt to manipulate language for the sake of narrating others' perspectives, is impossible. Those who try do not survive intact. The best option, he seems to suggest, is to embody the dialectal realm between refusal to accept arbitrary boundaries and fragmentations *and* acknowledgment of the inherent idiosyncrasy of the individual consciousness.

**CHAPTER FIVE:
The Sense of the South:**

How a “Synesthetic” Outlook Delivers Us from Evil

In *Light in August*, Faulkner tells the story of a woebegone orphan Joe Christmas, abandoned by his family and adopted by the staunch Calvinist MacEachern couple. While Christmas is arguably the central figure of the novel, much of the third-person narration follows others in Jefferson, Mississippi, including Lena Grove, Christmas' now-pregnant former lover, Joe Brown, his partner in the bootleg business and Joanna Burden, his older lover and companion who is labeled an outcast for her family's abolitionist history. Although Faulkner's narrative dips into the perspectives of these many minds with the liberal use of free indirect speech, it is for the most part cohesive, as are the complex interrelationships between these characters. Compared to *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August* is distinct in its narrative directness and overall forward chronological motion. And unlike those of the two earlier novels, key players in *Light in August* do not differ vastly in character—nobody in the story is as distinct as, for example, Benjy and Jason of *The Sound and the Fury*. In *Light in August*, Faulkner presents a narrative and landscape that is significantly more cohesive and significantly less defined by individuals' specific sensory synesthesia. But despite the more conventional narrative that the novel presents, its main subject matter—the status of race-relations in the South—is bitterly divisive. The way that Faulkner's southerners in *Light in August* approach thinking about the world in which they live is divided, bent on building boundaries, especially between black and white. Even Joe Christmas, the novel's troubled, tragic mulatto, is unable—or perhaps unwilling—to navigate the social divisions, and instead forces himself to choose black *or* white. Christmas is a synesthete, but his synesthesia is found in the outlines of his character; it is more subdued and pertains more to the narrative as a whole than to his particular consciousness. In other words, Joe Christmas' synesthesia serves as a backlight that illuminates his intuitive,

perceptive, observant character. For Joe, synesthetic perceptions arise particularly *when* he is cognizant of race. Ironically, his perception does not stretch as far as to accept a biracial identity, an identity that, like synesthesia, is inherently combination-based and inherently dialectical.

As a synesthete, Joe Christmas' sense-mixing is certainly not as pronounced as that of Benjy, Quentin or Vardaman. But he is still nonetheless able to sometimes interpret the world through a combination or blurring of senses, such as when he sits awake at night at the outset of chapter five:

“Then it seemed to him, sitting on the cot in the dark room, that he was hearing a myriad sounds of no greater volume—voices, murmurs, whispers, of trees, darkness, earth; people: his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places—which he had been conscious of all his life without knowing it, which were his life, thinking *God perhaps and me not knowing that too* He could see it like a printed sentence, fullborn and already dead. *God loves me too* like the faded and weathered letters on a last year's billboard *God loves me too* (LIA 105).

At this moment, Christmas is reflecting in the quiet that exists after Joe Brown, his partner in the bootlegging business, has drunkenly fallen asleep. Joe Brown has just come home drunk and obnoxious. When Christmas physically forces him to be quiet, Joe Brown shouts, “Take your black hand off of me, you damn niggerblooded—” Christmas strikes him again, but Brown continues. “You're a nigger, see? You said so yourself. You told me. But I'm white. Im wh—” And yet again, Christmas matches Brown's verbal assault with a physical one. But even in the midst of holding Brown captive, Christmas realizes, quite intuitively, *Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something*. In the quiet that follows when Brown falls asleep, Christmas then begins to contemplate the “sounds of no greater voices.” It seems that Brown's racial slurring is what provokes Christmas' thought process about the voices, as if Brown's voice in the darkness—especially a voice that alludes to Christmas' past in terms of his racial heritage—dredges up other facts, other voices, of Christmas' past and his origin. Somewhat indirectly, Christmas

seems to ponder the possible effect of his past upon his future—hence the “*Something is going to happen to me.*”

Christmas hears a blending of sounds, and, synesthetically, can hear the darkness and then envisions his life “like a printed sentence, fullborn and already dead.”^{xii} Because Christmas mentions God just before this description, it seems productive to read this description as the vision God might have on Christmas' life, a vision of fullness and completion that would only be accessible to an omniscient perspective. His thoughts of God also seem to summon Christmas' negative view of religion—especially in light of his painful past with the MacEacherns—and he realizes that he is troubled by his current relationship with Joanna Burden “because she started praying over me” (*LIA* 105). Joe, uncomfortable with the power of religion, especially as his abusive adoptive father had used it, is also uncomfortable when Joanna asks him to kneel down and pray with her; it suggests to him that all that is left for them to do is lay down and die.

“Maybe it would be better if we were both dead,” Joanna muses (*LIA* 278). Joe then thinks aloud to himself, “She ought not to started praying over me. She would have been all right if she hadn't started praying over me. It was not her fault that she got too old to be good any more. But she ought to have had better sense than to pray over me” (*LIA* 106). It is for this reason that Joe decides to kill Joanna Burden. Of course, he does not anticipate the fact that she plans to kill them both, and he ends up slitting her throat out of self-defense.

Regardless, Joe realizes that it looks as if he has murdered her, he must escape. The first place he runs is Freedman Town, a black neighborhood. “Then he found himself,” we are told, “surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring talking laughing in a language not his” (*LIA* 114). Momentarily, Joe seems to find himself, his identity, among black people, just hours after Brown

accuses him of being black. For virtually his entire life, he has been raised and treated as a white person, but when he is dubbed black, he suddenly begins to feel black. Similarly, after Joe Brown reminds Christmas that he is black (even though we, and Joe Christmas himself, do not know for sure whether he is part black), Christmas kills the white woman Joanna Burden, an act that will without a doubt frame him as a stereotypical aggressive, criminal black male. And also interesting is the way in which Christmas' synesthetic perception arises when he thinks about Freedman Town, just as it does in the aftermath of Joe Brown's racial slur.

[The invisible negroes] seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring talking laughing in a language not his. As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosenelit, so that the street lamps themselves seemed to be further spaced, as if the black life, the black breathing had compounded the substance of breath so that not only voices but moving bodies and light itself must become fluid and accrete slowly from particle to particle, of and with the now ponderable night inseparable and one (*LIA* 114).

Again Joe's synesthesia arises: he sees himself enclosed by voices and “cabinshapes,” feels “black breathing” as a substance and understands the moving bodies of others around him, as well as the brightness of the streetlights as becoming “fluid.” Joe Christmas' synesthesia seems to arise when he is particularly aware of race.^{xiii} His tendency is to blur the senses as a figure whose race is also “blurred” or unclear. Fittingly, he envisions the light and the night becoming “inseparable and one.” Perhaps this kind of unity is just that—a vision. After all, in the moment Joe Christmas' ability to find himself in the black Freedman Town is telling—whether he is consciously or subconsciously aware the impact of Brown's words, they strike an irrevocable chord in Christmas' self-conception: he cannot ignore the myth of his “black blood.”

His synesthesia, his complicated racial identity, his killing of Joanna and his consequent departure from society all contribute to the crystallization of Joe Christmas' status as an outsider. And when he meets others after entering Freedman Town, his outsider status becomes even more

pronounced. “His steady white shirt and pacing dark legs died among long shadows bulging square and huge against the August stars” (*LIA* 116); his white and black clothing disappearing into the shadows, foreshadows the death (or perhaps still birth) of the possibility for Joe to claim a mixed-race identity. He is confronted by another man in the street, one who asks, “What you want, whitefolks?” The man does not see Joe as black, like himself, nor as biracial, which Joe very likely is. Rather, the stranger immediately perceives Joe as a white man, and, in the black area of town, such a categorization is synonymous with outsider status.

The “blackness” that isolates Joe from white society is the missing key to his acceptance in Freedman Town. Importantly, what also is missing is a society that would entertain the idea of an individual who is both black *and* white as one who still maintains a unified identity. As Faulkner himself explained to an audience at the University of Virginia years after writing *Light in August*, “Joe's great tragedy was that 'he did not know what he was, and so he was nothing. He deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know what he was ... That to me was the tragic, central idea of the story—that he didn't know what he was, and there was no way possible in life for him to find out’” (Berland 73). Of course, in a society so defined by race, no other means of self-definition or placement within the context of society is possible.

From an early age, Joe Christmas is branded as black. As Alwyn Berland writes in *Light in August: A Study in Black and White*, “Joe has been pushed all his life toward the black side ... What he has chosen to be is in fact what he believes to be predetermined: to be black and to fly from it; to see the possibility of being white and to reject it” (Berland 43). Joe Christmas passes for white in the eyes of most adults at the orphanage where he spends his childhood, but few know his secret: the orphanage dietician suspects that the reason the janitor watches Joe so intently is because he has come to work at the orphanage for that very purpose, and he knows

that Joe is part black. “You knew before the other children started calling him Nigger,” she accuses. “You came out here at the same time . . . You came here just to do that, to watch him and hate him” (*LIA* 127). Later, the dietician, paranoid that Joe has caught her in the middle of a sexual encounter with another orphanage employee, and, now worried that the janitor will not take her side, decides to inform the matron of what she believes to be the truth about Joe's racial background in hopes that he will be sent away.

Joe is sent away, but not to the black orphanage, like the dietician expects. Instead, he is placed with an elderly white couple, the MacEacherns, who are devout Calvinists and live in the countryside. During his teenage years, Joe rebels from their strict religious regime by drinking and starting to date Bobbie, a waitress who works at a forbidden restaurant in town, and as a prostitute. Eventually, Joe lets his guard down and tells Bobbie that he is part black, and she claims, uncomfortably, not to believe him (*LIA* 196-197). Later, after Mr. MacEachern catches Joe dancing with Bobbie at the restaurant, and Joe knocks his adoptive father to the floor and steals money from him, then finds Bobbie to run away with her, she verbally spits in his face: “Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!” (*LIA* 216). Bobbie's reaction shocks Joe, who wonders, “*Why, I committed murder for her. I even stole for her*” (*LIA* 217) as he tries to understand that his lover, who once claimed that she did not even *believe* he was black, is now effectively claiming that she has been nice enough to treat him like a white man. When Bobbie prepares to leave with the others who work at the restaurant, choosing to run away with them instead of with Joe, she claims, “He told me himself he was a nigger!” thus turning Joe's self-admission into evidence for his violent conduct. “The son of a bitch! Me f.ing for nothing a nigger son of a bitch that would get me in a jam with the clodhopper police” (*LIA* 218). The scene and the chapter close with Joe being

beaten by the other men, who physically abuse him as a black criminal. Once again he is an outcast, an other.

After more than a decade of virtual wandering and homelessness, Joe comes to settle in Jefferson, where he finds Joanna Burden on the outskirts of town. The two become lovers and companions and eventually, Joanna suggests that Joe attend a black college and study law. She assures him that it is for his own benefit, and that he will be welcomed there: “They will take you,” she explains. “Any of them will. On my account. You can choose any one you want among them. We wont even have to pay” (*LIA* 276). Joe seems puzzled and even offended by Joanna's association of him with black people. “‘To school,’ his mouth said. ‘A nigger school. Me’” (*LIA* 276). The idea is so repulsive to Joe that he cannot say it himself; rather, “his mouth” and “his voice” do. “‘A nigger college, a nigger lawyer ,’ his voice said, quiet ...” (*LIA* 276-277). When Joanna implores Joe to tell the school that he is part black, in order to be exempt from payment, he is outraged: “Shut up. Shut up that drivell. Let me talk” (*LIA* 277). Clearly the idea of associating with other blacks, let alone claiming to be black himself, is abhorrent to Joe. After his younger exploration of his alleged blackness backfires, Joe reverts to a white-washed identity that does not brand him as “other,” and when others speak of his blackness, he automatically associates it with a negative identity, and attempts to avoid any characterization as such.

But perhaps he has reason for such an association. Since childhood, Joe has been inundated with the message that black is bad. The children at the orphanage taunt him with slurs; later his girlfriend dumps him with the same sentiment. And growing up in the South during his time, black or white, is enough in itself to instill in anyone a divisive view of race. It makes sense that Joe is unable or unwilling to accept a biracial identity, but nonetheless Faulkner lucidly pinpoints this oversight of Joe's as the tragic mulatto's tragic flaw. Perhaps the flaw itself is

unavoidable, and the tragedy exists because Joe has no choice *but* to choose one race or the other, which is precisely what Joe does, given the circumstances. When he wanders into Freedman Town, he opts to be black, but is unable to convey his choice, and is thus taken for white. When he opts to be white, essentially by dating a white woman, he admits that he is part black, which perhaps can be read as a subtle admission of a biracial identity. But this admission is brushed aside. “I don't believe it,” Bobbie tells him. Here a biracial existence is cast aside as something unbelievable, impossible. Joe's admission to being “part” black has functioned as a mechanism that changes Bobbie's mind about his race. In their last moments together, Bobbie can only see Joe for his blackness. The fact that he is only “part” black matters not—the “one drop” rule is the law of the land.

Although the truth of Joe's racial background—whether he is in fact part black—is never revealed in the novel, Joe's tragedy arises both from others' naming of him—casting him as black—and from the fact that he, too, plays this name game, that he, too, buys into society's racial structure as an objective truth. Perhaps it is not possible to determine whether Joe's claiming of his part-black identity, his admission to Bobbie and then, years later, to Joanna and business partner Joe Brown, is an outgrowth of his pride or a result of his guilt. Does Joe Christmas admit to those close to him that he is black because he believes his race is a relevant part of his identity, a heritage with which he identifies, or does he admit it as a confession of a dark, haunting secret? Even if the answer is unclear, what does become apparent is that Joe's claim to his identity—or perhaps his alleged identity—is cause for his trouble. It drives Bobbie away from him, it exacerbates his anger with Joanna and it gives Joe Brown an easy out and a shot at the one thousand dollar reward placed on Christmas for Joanna's murder and the arson of her home.

Joe Brown's accusation of Christmas sets the witch hunt for Christmas in motion. Although Joe Brown does not know for certain that Christmas has killed Joanna—he did not witness the killing and he certainly does not know that Christmas killed her in self-defense—he does know, from Christmas' own admission, that he is part black. (Ironically, Christmas himself does not even *know* this, though the teasing of the children at the orphanage has cemented the thought in his mind.) When Brown tells the sheriff that Christmas is part black, not only does the sheriff take him at his word and claim “I believe you are telling the truth at last” (*LIA* 99), but Brown's story also manages to convince the marshal that he had known Christmas was black all along. “‘A nigger,’ the marshal said. ‘I always thought there was something funny about that fellow’” (*LIA* 99). Interestingly, the way that others seem to react to the news of Christmas' black identity is to claim that they had known of it all along. This kind of reaction suggests that Faulkner's southern society refuses to acknowledge either surprise or disillusionment where race is concerned. One either claims to not believe in Joe's mixed race identity, as Bobbie initially does, or claims to have known about his blackness all along, as Bobbie ultimately does (and as do the orphanage dietician and the marshal).

Thus, the mixed identity is made out to be an impossibility, and Joe, framed as a black man who has been “mistakenly” labeled as white, is re-labeled black when the situation makes it convenient and useful for those who define him. Faulkner seems determined to demonstrate that society's construction of race is arbitrary, situational and name-based. Like language and time, it grows out of observable sensory data—visible skin color, in this case—but is contorted and perverted by our desire to impose a logical framework on our observations, a framework contingent on differences between sensations. This is why the reactions to Christmas' identity are so ludicrous: they are not even based on sense observations—visibly, Joe Christmas looks white.

They are based *only* on the imposed, unnatural logical structure that equates blackness with negative aggression and crime, and thus aggression and crime with blackness. Joe Christmas' black identity is rendered believable not because his physical appearance changes and he suddenly looks black, but because a black identity fits the actions he is accused of having committed.

Though the possibility of a mixed identity is excluded by society, Faulkner could not have been more effective in casting Joe Christmas as a racially ambiguous—and thus dialectical—figure. As David Minter explores in *Faulkner's Questioning Narratives*, Joe Christmas's ambiguous racial identity can serve as a lesson on our dangerous tendency to divide and categorize people based on race, and, more broadly, to divide and categorize our world by an “either/or” binary:

The shadows and greyness that we associate with him, from beginning to end, reinforce our sense that he belongs exclusively to neither [black nor white] ... but to both and, therefore, to neither—or, put another way, to a possibility that exists within his world only as something envisaged but still unrealized. His strange, limited triumph lies, therefore, in this—that despite everything that is done to him, he remains at least in part dedicated to visionary possibilities of life (Minter 92).

If Joe is in fact biracial, if he does inhabit a racial gray area, then Joe himself embodies the potential for racial harmony in the South. In Christmas, Faulkner provides a last glimmer of the possibility for dialectical existence—one caricatured and exaggerated by race—and a grave warning against southern society's heady willingness to eradicate any and all attempts at such a mode of existence.

Indeed, Joe is a tragic figure, worthy of joining the ranks of Quentin Compson and Darl Bundren. All three individuals are perceptive, intuitive, synesthetes fallen from grace in their attempts to attain some sense of objectivity, of “rightness” that serves to describe their world. The important question to ask here is, why do these synesthetes, these individuals who ought to

be familiar with the idiosyncratic, the enigmatic, the subjective, harbor such a strong desire to characterize the world objectively, to escape their own perspectives? Essentially, shouldn't they know better? Surprisingly, no. Quentin, Darl and Joe are unique from characters such as Benjy and Vardaman in that they are unforgivingly logical, and the entrance of structured reasoning upon their sensory capacities is what drives them to situate themselves reductively in their worlds.

In Quentin's case, his synesthetic relationship with time is what draws him to think he can control it. Of course, as noted, Quentin's attempt to outrun time leads him to suicide, so we can conclude that his case demonstrates the impossibility to both control time *and* survive to experience such control. Quentin cannot escape his place in history, the passage of time or his own perspective. Darl's keenness with language—with metaphor, which, as we learned earlier, stems from synesthetic connections—is what convinces him that he can use it as a device to categorize and thus control those around him. His drive to narrate others' perspectives drives him away from his own perspective, and thus he becomes dissociated from himself. Joe's case is somewhat unique from the other two. His synesthesia is not as pronounced, but elegantly arises when he thinks of race. It seems to function as a subconscious allusion to his own combined sense of existence, his combined racial makeup, if we are to assume that he is in fact both black and white. Joe falls prey to society's racial construction just as easily as Quentin falls for the illusion of escaping time and Darl for the illusion of objective language, but in Joe's case, much of his tragedy exists in that he is *forced* to regard the fractured racial structure as objective.

Quentin and Darl seem to dig their own graves, in a sense. Darl could have chosen to mind his own business, so to speak, and Quentin could have *not* killed himself, and instead lived in the moment. In Joe's case, avoiding the strict racial structure of the South is impossible. Thus

Joe is conditioned to think that he can only be *either* black or white, but not both dialectically. The South's racial structure refuses biracial existence, and thus Joe must follow suit. It may be unclear why he decides to confide in others that he is black, but without a doubt he comes to believe that such an admission marks him, and he seems to—consciously or otherwise—adopt a stereotypically black identity: he follows through with his eerie feeling that he is “going to do something” and murders a white woman, and becomes a stereotypical black male criminal on the run from his crime. Joe Christmas becomes what he has been labeled, even before the crime is, in fact, proven to have been committed by him. After all, we hear of Joe Brown's accusation *before* we learn that Joe Christmas actually kills Joanna Burden. Faulkner's sequence of narration is indeed suggestive. Joe's adaptation to his purported blackness is proof that he assumes that the racial structure of southern society will function as an objective categorization. By running away from his crime, and then later accepting that he is a criminal—regardless the circumstances of the crime—Joe Christmas tacitly subscribes to the false objective (false in that it is imposed and man-made) of racial hierarchy. He takes it as gospel, like everyone else in the South, rather than stand up as a biracial individual, an example of someone who inherently embodies the dialectical, combined, complex, subjective nature of human life and human thought. He is tracked down, shot and castrated, humiliated in death as just another black male criminal. In his inability to claim a biracial existence, in his gradual subscription to the idealized, elevated, revered racial hierarchy of the time, Joe Christmas goes the way of Quentin and Darl, who also subscribe to a false sense of objectivity, and again illustrates Faulkner's caution regarding any man-made concept as objectively true.

These three Faulknerian synesthetes tend to disregard—or are oblivious to—the very dialectic within them, the notion that—objectivity be damned— they *already* harbor the possibility

of truthful understanding, the possibility of a dialectical intuition. They alone struggle with executing a fine balance between, (1) an inherently intuitive, intelligent, knowledgeable and curious nature that yearns for universality and objectivity, and (2) the idiosyncratic and combination-based nature that is defined by their synesthesia. But Faulkner seems to suggest that the struggle itself is an accomplishment. It's yet another rendition of "knowledge through suffering." The real tragedy is that Quentin, Darl and Joe *give up* the struggle, attempting to defy *both* relativism and a communion of the senses. Through the travails of Quentin, Darl and Joe, as a collective juxtaposition to Benjy and Vardaman, we learn that limiting our senses limits the amount of sense we can make of an idea, limits the complexity and richness with which we are able to see the world. In other words, limiting the senses is unnatural and counter-productive to a truer, more complete, more inclusive understanding. Through his characterization of synesthetes in his novels, Faulkner seems to suggest that the more senses—the more identities, perceptions, narratives—that are allowed to mingle, the richer a sense of life will be allowed.

**CONCLUSION:
Philosophical Influence and Implications
of Faulkner's Works**

Making sense of life and the human condition seems to be one of Faulkner's chief concerns. In these three novels, Faulkner follows the evolution of human consciousness, from its pre-logical, undifferentiated, purely sensory origins, through the impact of language and logic on the sensory mind, to the limitation and potential detriment of using language and logic to construct superficial boundaries and divisions within a given social structure—notably, for Faulkner, the American South. We can read the cautionary tale that Faulkner presents in *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August* as a warning against the destructive nature of our tendency to divide, fragment and limit, against our compulsion to erect boundaries that we foolishly take for objective truths, when the real “objective” truth is that each individual's perspective is inherently idiosyncratic. Only through avoiding boundaries and a strictly binary means of interpretation and judgement—and embracing multiple meanings and similarities between individual perspectives—can we reach a dialectical, communicative existence.

The philosophical underpinnings of Faulkner's work are subtle but telling: As Lothar Honnighausen writes in *Faulkner: Masks and Metaphors*, the central foci of Faulkner's art are “the problem of narrative perspectivism or point of view, the fascination with mask and role-playing, and the emphasis on metaphor as a literary form and a form of knowledge” (64).

Honnighausen aptly cites Nietzsche's perspectivist influence in Faulkner's work:

Nietzsche's perspectivism includes both an emphasis on multiple points of view and a fusion of the intellectual with the emotional, and thus constitutes a congenial method of approaching Faulkner ... Apart from the conceptual framework of perspectivism-mask-metaphor ... there are some aspects of Nietzsche's mask concept that are of special interest ... For Nietzsche, the mask is not so much a means of hiding sinister intent as it is a concomitant or consequence of profundity ... “[T]here is not only deceit behind a mask

... Every profound spirit needs a mask: more, around every profound spirit a mask is continually growing, thanks to the constantly false, that is to say shallow interpretation of every word he says, every step he takes, every sign of life he gives" (*Beyond Good and Evil* 69-70) (Honnighausen 66-67).

Honnighausen (and of course Nietzsche) present a useful means of reading Faulkner's work.

Nietzschian perspectivism is evident especially in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, through Faulkner's employment of multiple and varied narrative voices and his amalgamation of sensation (also known as synesthesia), identity and family structure. But the mask trope in Faulkner's work is also central to our understanding of *why* synesthetes Quentin, Darl and Joe come to experience their respective misfortunes, why, despite their conceivable ability to naturally understand the world through their dialectical, free-flowing synesthetic perceptions, Quentin, Darl and Joe adhere—and eventually fall prey—to the man-made structures of time, language and race. Why does synesthesia fail to save them?

Perhaps, as profound spirits, as inquisitive, reflective individuals, they've each put on a mask, a mask that convinces each of them that self-transcendence is possible *through* their unique synesthetic perceptions. Essentially, Quentin, Darl and Joe, who, unlike Benjy and Vardaman, have been influenced by language and logic, can be read as abusive synesthetes, in a sense. They trespass beyond the purpose of synesthesia as Faulkner presents it, beyond his presentation of sense-mixing as an extreme, but useful and poignant example of an idiosyncratic consciousness (Synesthete or not, each consciousness is idiosyncratic in that it belongs to an individual and *only* to that individual). Instead, whether consciously or otherwise, Quentin, Darl and Joe each attempt to reach beyond his perspective and live according to what he believes to be an objective standard. Quentin lives by the hands of the clock, even after his watch breaks. He believes that his intimate, synesthetic relationship with time will allow him to manipulate time by outrunning it with his own self-inflicted, self-controlled death. Darl abuses his gift with

metaphor (which is evident through his synesthetic language) and attempts to extract himself from his personal narrative and make others' narratives his own, as told in his words. In his attempt to do so he loses his own perspective. Joe's conception of his racial background—of the possibility of being *part* black—catalyzes his identity crisis. Arguably, because of his placement in history and society, Joe misses his chance to embrace the possibility of a dialectical existence. He condemns himself to life as a black man, not a *partially* black man, because he would be branded as black, not biracial by the man-made racial structure of the larger community, a structure taken to be objectively true. Despite his latent sense-mixing, a quirky idiosyncrasy that, perhaps in a different age^{xiv}, a different place, a different society, would compel him to realize that life is not written in merely black or white, Joe Christmas is instead overcome by the status quo.

Ultimately, Faulkner demonstrates in all three novels, but most profoundly and resonantly in the fractured southern community of *Light in August*, that the status quo is too often the product of man-made “objectives” that have no relation to “truth.” As Nietzsche indicates plainly in *The Gay Science*:

[I]t was only very late that truth emerged—as the weakest form of knowledge. It seemed that one was unable to live with it: our organism was prepared for the opposite; all its higher functions, sense perception and every kind of sensation worked with those basic errors that had been incorporated since the immemorial. Indeed, even in the realm of knowledge these propositions became the norms according to which “true” and “untrue” were determined—down to the most remote regions of logic. Thus the strength of knowledge does not depend on its degree of truth but on its age, on the degree to which it has been incorporated, on its character as a condition of life (Nietzsche 169).

Nietzsche's philosophy overlaps with Faulkner's characterization of his ill-fated synesthetes, each of whom try in vain to follow what they deem to be objective truth. Quentin assumes that time, as an objective source of definition, will always define him, unless he fully manages escape it.

Darl views language as a means to construct and narrate the “truths” of those around him; he mistakenly attempts to objectively render others’ perspectives in his own words. And Joe (as a product of Faulkner's southern society) renounces the possibility of a biracial existence, instead taking the binary racial code of the day as an objective measure of identity. All three men fail to understand Nietzsche's advocacy against dividing the world into “true” and “untrue” or, for that matter, dividing the world at all. In *Making Sense of Nietzsche*, his philosophical inquiry on the famed perspectivist, Richard Schacht explains that:

Nietzsche derives his models and metaphors from many and diverse sources, and avails himself of the different ways of thinking associated with and suggested by them, precisely *in order to play them off against each other*, and to avoid becoming locked into any one or particular cluster of them. They afford him the means of discovering and devising an expanding repertoire of perspectives upon the matters with which he was concerned, and so developing and sharpening what he calls the many and different “eyes” needed to contribute to a growing and deepening comprehension of them (Schacht 95).

The philosopher's mode of investigation, discovery and understanding is precisely what Quentin, Joe and Darl lack, or have relinquished. Quentin feebly ignores the idea that self-transcendence is impossible, and that what works in its stead is accepting one's perspective as one within a multitude of varied human consciousnesses. Darl seems to hit closer to the mark of Nietzsche's strategy, but he misses the piece in which his perspective can influence others' and vice versa. Instead, he cheatingly speaks *for* others, not with them, and uses language as a manipulative tool rather than a communicative one. And Joe seems woefully unaware of the notion that more than one perspective can inform his identity. Each man tragically misses the cruciality of dialect to both his self-conception and his worldview.

In terms of Faulknerian synesthetes, we can see clearly the difference between the pre-logical and post-logical individual. Benjy and Vardaman, who are, respectively, pre-logical and semi-logical, do not suffer the plights of Quentin, Darl and Joe—for these two it would be

impossible. Certainly not Benjy, nor even Vardaman, is as hell-bent on truth seeking, as are Quentin, Darl and Joe. While each of the latter three becomes obsessed with following a false sense of absolutism, Benjy is so inherently sensory that no such quest would ever appeal to him, let alone be understood by him. He is the infant, the pre-logical soul of Faulkner's story of consciousness, and synesthesia is virtually his only mode of connection with his world. Interestingly, the very connective nature of his synesthesia exists as a connection only within his own idiosyncratic mind, and, like an infant, Benjy never leaves the self. Vardaman demonstrates merely an early understanding of language and logic, while Quentin, Joe and Darl elucidate the pitfalls of an over-investment in a quest for objective, absolute truth. This is not to say that Faulkner implores us all to be mute, or moaning idiots, or to equate—as Vardaman does—our mothers with fish. More plausibly, in the spirit of the dialectic, Faulkner's texts suggest that taking up residence in the dialectical gray area between the utterly sensory and the utterly logical is the means to grasping “truth,” or an understanding that is, in Nietzsche's terms, more defined by its multiple means of approaching meaning, by its “character as a condition of life,” by its resonance. Faulkner describes a world in which an idiot's sensory wanderings are rendered poetic, and a genius loses himself to logic, a world in which multiple narratives are crucial in just beginning to explicate lived experience and in which past and present inherently meet, but the individual himself will forever only be his own self in his own time. This is a world in which the reader is forced to puzzle over just how we should use and understand language, logic, time and race, just where the boundary between communication and the figment of the objective exists, just who we should trust as capable of rendering the “real.” This is a world in which sensory mixing is what makes sense, and only through synesthesia—of the senses, of perspectives, of narratives—can “true” sense be made.

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- i He is poetic in that he narrates his sensory experience descriptively and at length.
- ii A type of synesthesia in which hearing or reading a number, letter or word produces a sensation of color, often of that grapheme in a specific color
- iii A type of synesthesia in which hearing or reading a number, letter or word produces a sensation of color, often of that grapheme in a specific color
- iv Not Benjy's future, but future synesthetes in Faulkner's work, those who have developed the capacity for language and logic
- v "Not" will become an important topic later, especially in our discussion of *As I Lay Dying*. The notion of "not" is what allows for the conception of a binary world.
- vi At this point, Addie is dead. Vardaman realizes this and continues to avoid the notion of "not" or non-existence, by replacing his mother with the fish. Thus, nobody or nothing is "not" or non-existent.
- vii It's interesting and fitting how in this ungrammatical sentence, two negatives, for Vardaman, make a positive.
- viii It's interesting how Darl hinges the "truth" of Dewey Dell's secret on its being a statement, or her usage of language to construct it as "real."
- ix It seems as if Faulkner cares not whether Darl *is* in fact correct, but rather stresses that Darl's flaw is that he claims to *know* he is correct.
- x This is the first of two instances in which Quentin *almost* grasps Faulkner's larger point, that a dialectical existence is preferable and richer than a binary one.
- xi Mortimer writes the same of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. Christmas' loss of self arguably parallels that of Quentin in *The Sound and the Fury* and Darl in *As I Lay Dying*.
- xii It is as if Joe understands that he cannot transcend his perspective, or that he is bound to a certain fate. In this sense, he has learned the lesson that Faulkner has set out for Quentin, but as we will see, larger issues are at stake for Joe as a tragic mulatto in the Faulknerian South.
- xiii Joe's synesthesia seems to function as a warning to heed his inner dialectician where identity is concerned, and not to succumb to being branded as strictly black (as in this case) or white.
- xiv Naturally, though, Joe is confined to his sociocultural, historical perspective.