Studies in English

Volume 15 *Selections from Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1975*

Article 10

1978

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I

It is a commonplace that in 1917 a generation of Americans went to war for soiled words and came back determined to purify them. Hemingway knew that "glory," "sacrifice," "sacred" belonged in the meat yards of Chicago. Dos Passos could taste how "the clean words our fathers spoke" had been "slimed and fouled." E. E. Cummings in the Enormous Room of a French prison reverenced a man called Zulu who could only emit the phonetic noises "Muh" and "Mog," but who was "a master of the well chosen silence." The consensus had it that language was in decay. To stop the rot Hemingway retreated to small concrete words. Dos Passos piled up more and more evidence. E. E. Cummings, like the Dadaists, longed to bury printed matter under blocks of abstract color so that dirtied words might be seen as just one of the resources available to the artist—a diminished one.

Faulkner was never an ambulance driver. He got no nearer wartime Europe than a Royal Air Force training camp in Canada—but I would like to suggest that, by using peculiarly Southern values against Southern myths, Faulkner achieves a purification of language not only more astringent than any of his American contemporaries, but strikingly different in kind from the linguistic attitudes that characterized the major modern figures, Joyce, Eliot, and Pound.

To back up the claim, I shall analyze a passage from the Addie Bundren section of *As I Lay Dying*. This may seem a narrow way into a broad subject, but Faulkner critics have long focused on Addie Bundren in their debate about Faulkner and language. I think that too often they choose the wrong piece of Addie Bundren and so fail to hear the details of what she is saying.

II

"He did not know that he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name

until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse*. It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now. And then I would think *Cash* and *Darl* that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away. I would say, All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them."[1]

"Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse." Addie is in fact asking a riddle which could be worded, "When is the man Anse, the word Anse?" Riddles work by reducing several terms to one term, "When is a door not a door? When it's a jar." A door and a jar are not the same thing but the riddle, working on the pun in "ajar," tricks two words, "door" and "jar," for a moment into one, "ajar." The game pleases because it promotes a mystery and solves it with a solution that is at once satisfying and impossible; a door is no more a jar than a man is a word.

Riddling impulses are present in Addie's determined effort to make Anse fit his name. Her attempt asserts that language is a literal system, within which each word exists in a one to one relationship with a thing. Addie by asking the question, "How does a man earn his name?" tries to guarantee the answer, "Because it is natural to him." She takes as her model for the naturalness of language a proper name, the most referential of terms (a man's name very rarely needs to be explained, it usually points to one particular man, unless there happen to be five Anses in the room at any one time). But Addie is still not sure that the riddle is going to give her the right answer—after all the name "Anse" *is* a word consisting of four arbitrary phonemes: in the cause of naturalness, Addie substitutes a storage jar for the word "Anse" and takes her riddles to the kitchen where she pours Anse's blood like molasses into that jar. Rephrased, the riddle reads, "When is the man Anse a storage jar?" The answer, "[when he is] a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty doorframe." This is an approximate answer since it replaces the vessel with a shape that is only "like" an empty doorframe; it is

[1] William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (The Modern Library, New York, 1967), p. 165. Subsequent pagination refers to this edition.

however significant on two counts: it is lifeless, i.e., Anse's blood has coagulated into a cold molasses; it is nameless, "and then I would find I had forgotten the name of the jar." The solution that substitutes a pot for Anse and a doorframe for both, may seem to mystify more than to satisfy. Nonetheless each substitution is one stage in a systematic purification. A word is remade as an object and that object becomes an empty space seen through an open door. During the cleaning up a man dies and his name is erased. The doorjamb that marks the last in this series of substitution is hardly an answer to the riddle but it is a shape that has a double characteristic. It is a silent and apparently empty space. It can be diagramatized□ . Addie has not solved her problem, but she has rephrased it as a threshold that a riddle might cross.

Addie lives in a physical world; neither she nor her thoughts escape the limits of the Bundren farm; her imagination works with the resources of the Mississippi hill country, and her language reflects the physical realities of her surroundings. Just as she keeps a clean house so she uses a neat language in which words must have a physically realizable value. Words come to her mind much as domestic utensils might come to her hand—pots, doorframes, spiders, molasses, clothes, and blood. She insists that even abstractions can be tidied away into physical objects by the simple expedient of comparing them to those objects:

> We had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam (p. 164)
> words that are not deeds . . . coming down like the cries of geese out of the wild darkness (p. 166)
> I would think of sin as garments which we would remove (p. 166)

The similes like the riddles are quite undisguised. In each case Addie substitutes a thing for an abstraction—spiders for dialogue, geese cries for words, garments for sin; the substitutions are justified by the silent assumption that nothing could be more natural. Addie's imagination, like her domesticity, dislikes loose ends and so her monologue is full of riddles and geometries whose resolution is simply a matter of tidying up.

Having set the molasses jar aside in an insecure mental niche, she tries the riddle of Anse's name again. Addie, lying in bed, "by (Anse) in the dark," touches her own slackening body and finds another

entrance in the shape of a jar—under her hand she has material for a further riddle:

> I would think: the shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think *Anse*, couldn't remember *Anse*. (p. 165)

The missing word marked by the gap in the typography could be one of two: "hymen" ("the shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a hymen") OR "phallus" ("the shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a phallus" [that broke the hymen]). Ideally the word should incorporate both. Addie needs a word that will trick the two into one. That word is "Anse," since it was his phallus that broke her hymen. But even now, knowing the answer, Addie will not use the word. ("I couldn't think *Anse*" implies that she couldn't think of the name then, but can now.) Instead she leaves a space in the print. By doing this she is describing her hymen as a space without words—the pause is a blank thought; blank because it is silent, silent because Addie has made a choice. Addie has linked "hymen" or virginity to silence, and this involves a rejection of the equally likely answer which would link "phallus" or fertility to a word—"Anse."

It is typical of Faulkner that virginity like silence is a negative value: virginity exists as a felt reality at and after the moment of its loss; silence can best be heard after noise.[2] Nevertheless for a moment in Addie's mind the negative value exists as a positive. The pure space in the text is the positive answer to her riddle, "When is the man Anse, the word Anse?", which could be rephrased as the riddle of language, "Why is a man, a word?" Answer, "because he is the violator of an original and silent purity." But farmers' wives have no use for such answers and Addie moves away from the riddling gap, to the fact of being the mother of two:

> It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now (p. 165)

[2] Faulkner allows even Henry Sutpen the fleeting suspicion that his sister's virginity is precious only insofar as it is there to be taken:

> Henry was the provincial, the clown almost, given to instinctive and violent action, rather than to thinking, who may have been conscious that his fierce provincial's pride in his sister's virginity was a fake quality which incorporated in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence to have existed at all. *Absalom, Absalom!* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1960), p. 440. Subsequent pagination refers to this edition.

This escape from a difficult riddle is as unsatisfactory as it is labored. The triple negative, cancelled out, leaves "I could not think of myself as being a virgin." But an "un" and a "no" are not easily disposed of. It is impossible to make a total denial in literature because the positive sign remains in printed evidence and more often than not is longer than the negative. Addie wants to forget the riddle and its tiresome equations—"virginity = silence," "fertility = language"—but her evasion draws attention to itself; a regrown hymen, a word like "unvirgin," and the hasty erasure of two sons are not easily passed. Furthermore, her compromise solution (I should imagine one of the most quoted pieces of literary graphmanship) is patently a falsification:

> And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other. (p. 165)

This formula is reached because Cora nagged and a riddle proved problematic, but it, more than any other statement in the novels, has stimulated influential generalizations about Faulkner's attitude toward language. Olga Vickery's is typical: "one of his basic attitudes is that language and logic act to obscure truth rather than to reveal it . . . barrenness attends all discussion."[3] The remark is I believe doubly mistaken; in *As I Lay Dying* as a whole, words are inseparable from acts—Whitfield, with a voice "bigger than himself," is a man of words who breaks his word—for Addie he "does," but having crossed a river in flood, he fails to "do," that is to "say." Anse, a less tautological example, is forced by a promised word to get to Jefferson. While doing so he behaves like a man who knows that bridges down, teams lost, and barns burned earn him a place in every barber's shop, on every porch, and anywhere in Yoknapatawpha where stories are told. Anse does too become a byword. In Addie's section, the graph ⊥ does not match the shape □ or its modified version " ", printed as a gap in the text. General claims about Faulkner's view of words will have to come to terms with the hole in

[3] Olga Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 8.

the text, rather than with a verbal graph drawn in exasperation to obscure the issue.

A great deal of Addie's section leads the reader back to " " or at least to a sense of an unstated theme. There are several points in the monologue where questions are almost asked, whose answers imply a subtext which, recovered from Addie's inarticulacy, would offer an account of language so complete that it would also be an account of the world.

> That's when I learned that words are no good; that words don't even fit what they are trying to say at (p. 163)

"At" is awkward; it gives direction to speech which is not generally thought of as so forcefully directional. What is it that all words are directed at?

OR, "I knew that the word was like the others, just a shape to fill a lack" (p. 164). The word that is a shape to fill a lack, rather than a gap, is the sign of some original loss which caused the "lack." How did this loss occur?

OR:

> I would think of him dressed in sin. I would think of him as thinking of me dressed also in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air. (pp. 166–67)

Addie's adultery is sinful before it is sexual—it is the sin that makes her hot for it. The stripping of the clothes is dogmatically urgent. Clearly Whitfield did not have Addie, as he must have had any number of Addies behind the tent at a revivalist meeting. She "took" him because he was "the instrument ordained by god" with whom adultery would be an offence "utter" and "terrible" enough to echo the original sin. God would have to hear. If the sob of their passion could be shaped it might do more than echo above them through the woods. Addie has been taught by Anse's usage that the "dead word" is "love." The image she uses here shapes an echo into a vessel and fills it with blood. A word that is flesh is one that regains value, proving by its quasi–religious example that all words might regain their values, and in so doing fall silent. That term which is natural is

never more than an echo, because, as a shared meaning, it doesn't need saying. In the adulterous episode that Addie describes, purity grows from profanity and silence rises out of a word. On whose authority do such events occur?
OR:

> But then I realized that I had been tricked by words older than Anse or love, and that the same words had tricked Anse too (p. 164)

What are the old words and what source gives them their original status?

In each case the unstated question raises the issue of the origins of language. Addie has been trained to almost ask this kind of question. She is the child of Fundamentalist theology. Her father traced the Calvinist stress on Original Sin to its logical dismissal of life, formulating it for his daughter as the central text "The reason for living is getting ready to stay dead a long time" (p. 167). Her lover must have reinforced the lesson: named for George Whitfield, an eighteenth-century circuit rider who claimed, "The fall of man is written in too legible characters not to be understood: Those that deny it by their denying prove it".[4] The remark is well within demagogic range of itinerant preachers during the 30's, who employed a similar rhetoric to persuade their congregations as to the originality of their sin. The tone of Addie's section is therefore understandably doctrinal. She inhabits a spiritual and geographical region where fundamentalist sects insisted upon the value of personal testimony. Southern Presbyterianism and Southern Methodism both stress that each man talks directly to God, and is a microcosm of the Fall and of a problematic redemption. However, neither institution offers a measure of whether or not the testifier is saved beyond more of the same, more systematic self scrutiny, more personal testimony. Driven in on itself by the absence of theological certainty the puritan imagination has often been solipsistic. Alternatively it avoids doubt by adopting conviction: Doc Hines and McEachern are a type common in Yoknapatawpha. Addie vacillates—her schoolroom sadism is the gesture of a fanatic, but the

[4]George Whitfield, "The Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent," collected in *Selected Sermons of George Whitfield* (The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1959), p. 85.

fanaticism is desperate. Her language is at once private and dramatic, riddles appear next to profundities. Obscurity generates its own rhetoric, and the monologue might at times be a sermon whose terms are as cryptic and convinced as any that Hightower gave to Jefferson. One thing is plain. Addie has a conviction, beyond personal arrogance, about the representative originality of everything in her life. Her virginity, to her, was the first that was ever lost; her adultery occurs in the eye of God; her children might well be divided tribes; her refusal of Anse is murder and her words are as new as Adam's—none of them is expendable since each word must contain what it names, in a word so ideally natural that it need not be said and can be left silent.

Addie's world is filled with oppositions, between death and life, deed and word, Whitfield and Anse, child and child. The point about what I am rather unsatisfactorily going to call her rage for origination is that the secondary term of every opposition must be reabsorbed by the primary. For example, male and female exist as an opposition, but when Addie remembers her marriage bed she absorbs Anse and can no longer imagine him; as she puts it, "I took Anse." The problem for the reader is how have the two become one, just how has the opposition between the sexes been overcome; why is living a preparation for death, or linguistically in the case of the first riddle, how does a man become his name?

Effectively Addie never gives us the answer, but led by her compulsive mixture of intuitive linguistics and primitive nonconformism, it is, I believe, possible to attempt one. Addie frequently mentions "dark voicelessness" (p. 166) "voiceless speech" (p. 167) and "the dark land talking of God's love" (p. 166); because this language is silent it must be associated with the silent gap in the text, and so form part of a clue to the first riddle. A remark like "the dark land talking of God's love" implies some original place, where in an earlier time a language was spoken that man can no longer hear. Since this place is linked to the gap in the text it must be a presexual place in a prelinguistic time: the nearest symbolic approximations that Addie can offer are the hymen and silence.

Given Addie's compulsion to understand what she cannot quite understand, a hypothetical piecing together of the story served by these symbols seems justified. It is a version of *Genesis* set in Eden before mankind was split into Adam and Eve. The garden is silent;

in it man lives in such amity with God that he is at one with all things, whether they are animals or objects—as a result of this he has no need to differentiate them from himself by naming them. The place is thoughtless, wordless, and sexless. This location adds a further term to Addie's equation. Eden is the source: "Eden = virginity = silence."

The story has a sequel. God divided man into man and woman, the single unit was doubled with the removal of the rib. The newly created woman ate the apple and offered man sin in two forms, sexual knowledge (a source of infinite multiplication) and knowledge as thought, which since we think in words is language (itself a source for the infinite multiplication of ideas). The sequel is the Fall which as the first moment of fertility and language adds a new initial term to Addie's second equation: "The Fall = fertility = language." According to this story language is synonymous with the Fall; like God's curious creation of man in his own image, like the division of man into man and woman, like the expulsion from the garden into the world—it is one more division. The gap between every word and its object is for Addie the gap between man and God. Language is the Fall and it happens every day.

In this Addie's Eden is more stringent than the Eden of Genesis. According to the Old Testament Adam was a namer before the division of the sexes, nouns were part of his God–given task:

> And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof (Genesis Ch. 2, v 19).

However, the words used by Adam have a divinely sanctioned naturalness. As part of Creation they seem physical in the way that the physical world is physical; that is to say, they contain the materials to which they refer. Their distinctive quality can be felt in the comparative value that we still give to "name" as against "word." Something of the shock that Eve's appearance had on these names is recorded by Mark Twain in his *Extracts from Adam's Diary*:

> "Monday" This new creature with the long hair is a good deal in the way. It is always hanging around and following me about. I don't like this; I am not used to company. I wish it would stay with the other animals. . . . Cloudy

to-day, wind in the east; think we shall have rain. . . . *We*? Where did I get that word? . . . I remember now—the new creature uses it.[5]

"We" is not the container of anything, it is an arbitrary sign. Linguistic abstractions begin to appear.

"Wednesday" I wish it would not talk; it is always talking. That sounds like a cheap fling at the poor creature, a slur; but I do not mean it so. I have never heard the human voice before, and any new and strange sound intruding itself here upon the solemn hush of these dreaming solitudes offends my ear and seems a false note. And this new sound is so close to me; it is right at my shoulder, right at my ear, first on one side and then on the other, and I am used only to sounds that are more or less distant from me.

Conversation pursues the occasional namer with an excess of words.

"Friday" The naming goes recklessly on, in spite of anything I can do. I had a very good name for the estate, and it was musical and pretty—GARDEN-OF-EDEN. Privately, I continue to call it that, but not any longer publicly. The new creature says it is all woods and rocks and scenery, and therefore has no resemblance to a garden. Says it *looks* like a park, and does not look like *anything* but a park. Consequently, without consulting me, it has been new-named—NIAGARA FALLS PARK. This is sufficiently highhanded, it seems to me. And already there is a sign up:

KEEP OFF
THE GRASS

My life is not as happy as it was.

Things require more than one name. As words multiply, writing appears not simply on signboards, but on the diary pages left blank by Adam before the opposite sex turned up.

Addie's version of this story of all kinds of separations and multiplications derives from a still more original division. Addie speaks enigmatically of "hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin" (p. 166). But how can God sin? Why should this sin be linked to beauty and love? What let the dark land in on the secret? Three questions which are clues to a first version that predates Genesis. God sinned when he divided himself. He made man after his own image as a mirror in which to see and love his own beauty. The Earth knows because, split from heaven, it too was part of the first fall.

[5] Mark Twain, *Extracts from Adam's Diary* (Harper, New York, 1901), p. 3. Subsequent pagination refers to this edition.

This reconstruction may sound fanciful; however, I do believe that this story, or one very like it, will give consistent answers to the riddles in her monologue. For example, "Why is the man Anse, the name Anse?" The riddle has two equally valid answers, a gap in the typography which is the sign for a silent and sexless Eden, or "Anse," which is the sign for a fertile and fallen word. Addie solves the contradiction by trying to ignore the second possibility. Her whole life has, it seems, been lived to erase the equation, "The Fall = fertility = language." She was a virgin who married in spite of herself, a mother outraged by each pregnancy, a silent woman unable to resist words. Her funeral plans are a last attempt to prove the primacy of "Eden = virginity = silence"; by insisting on a Jefferson burial, she returns not simply to her place of origin, but by lying in her family plot she cancels out her second (marital) name—Bundren, and reverts to her maiden name—a name which, because we never hear it, is silent.

My reading is willfully theoretical, but it seems to me that I have more licence for this than Addie's mathematical turn of mind. There is nothing in my equations as odd as the oddness of the title. I started with a riddle simply because the novel's title is a riddle. *As I Lay Dying*, "I" riddles: for a long time the reader probably assumes that the "I" refers to Addie, but her section complicates rather than affirms the assumption. If "living is getting ready to stay dead" (p. 167), the "I" should refer to the living and not to Addie, who is dead. In this case it is an anonymous pronoun asking for a name, by begging all names. "Dying" riddles: tradition has it that the whole of a life may pass before the eyes of a dying man, but Addie is in her coffin before we reach her last testimony. The title, in her case, might be more aptly phrased *As I Lay Dead*, unless the participle is intended to redeem the pronoun from death, by saving it from the natural outcome of time and its story. The possibility is not without seriousness given that Addie's goal is Eden. I started with a riddle about language because the entire narrative depends on Anse's word: *As I Lay Dying* is based on a verbal contract, fulfilled to cancel out his given word. I started with Addie's riddle because, although her section is late, it reveals the extent to which she invented her family. Two children will make the point; Cash is conspicuously silent because Addie made him a reticent child, "Anse had a word too, love he called it . . . (but) Cash did not need to say it to me, nor I

to him" (p. 164); Darl is a word–man because for Addie his conception was a matter of words, not of sperm:

> Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. (p. 164)

Above all I started with Addie's riddle of language, because it and the equations derived from it reappear constantly in Faulkner's work.

III

The general assumption that Faulkner and Addie share a mythology of language may be accurate, but if this is so it does not boil down to a mutual mistrust of words. Addie does claim that some words are arbitrary, but her every effort is to cure rather than to mistrust them. Her literalness persuades words back through the wall of language into the reality of what they signify; this is an initial step: ideally she wants the words on the page (indeed, on all the pages) to drain through that hole in the text to the silence that is the original tongue. Since her linguistic and her sexual attitudes are intertwined, verbal cancellations are attended by the reduction of sexual multiples. The redemption of silence is marked by the restoration of the hymen. Mentally she kills Anse, "And then he died, he did not know that he was dead" (p. 166). With or without the theological subtext, the "murder" is vicious. More dangerously, it may sound like nonsense. I suspect, however, that by this stage Addie's voice has imposed its own logic so that when the reader hears that one death is insufficient and that the evidence of the children must be removed, he is more concerned to discover the sense than to point the nonsense.

> I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. (p. 168)

The calculation has two answers; either Dewey Dell and Jewel are removed (Vardaman replacing them, to bring Anse's total to three—Cash, Darl, Vardaman) or Dewey Dell and Vardaman together make up the sum of the princeless Jewel, who remains Addie's child. The second possibility, far from rupturing the psychic

hymen, puts its presence to the test. Jewel, the child of a sanctified man and conceived in God's sight, is his mother's "cross" and her "salvation" (p. 160). The woman who claims of the natural birth of a child, "My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation" (p. 164), can only believe that as Jewel is her Christ, so she is his Virgin Mother.

Addie's systematic purifications are at odds with the linguistic atmosphere in which Modernism developed. *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, and *The Cantos* depend upon an assumption about the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. When Joyce declared the voices of his Dubliners "paralysed" and made it difficult to understand a word in *Ulysses*, except in relation to another word in *Ulysses*, he might have been dramatizing a remark by Ferdinand de Saussure:

> In language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither idea nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences that have issued from the system. The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other sounds that surround it.[6]

The paragraph is an accurate summary of *The Waste Land*'s form. In January, 1922 Eliot sent Pound the first draft of a narrative poem shaped through Tiresias, the central narrator. The returned manuscript has been likened by Hugh Kenner to "a dense mosaic." Tiresias, whatever Eliot may say in the Notes, has been relegated to a short piece in one section—one of many pieces arranged in a relationship of difference. *The Waste Land* is not properly a mosaic; small coloured pebbles are generally set in mortar to describe an outline. Pound's pen cleared outline away; indeed his cuts are so scrupulous that what remains is at first glance random. The bits and pieces of *The Waste Land* do not refer back to anything behind or beyond themselves—whether to Tiresias or to a bundle of myths—their meaning, along with the meaning of each line and each word, cannot be grouped outside "the play of signifying relations that constitutes language." Meaning as a fully constituted presence has vanished. Pound in his *A.B.C. of Reading* tells a story that makes the same point:

[6] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (McGraw-Hill, London, 1966), p. 120.

If you ask an average Westerner what 'red' is, he will tell you a colour, and then if you ask him what a colour is, he'll tell you that it is a vibration or a refraction of light, and then you ask him what *that* is and you get, "a modality of being, or non-being", or at any rate you get in beyond your depth, and beyond his depth.[7]

As an alternative Pound proposes the Chinese ideogram for "red" which combines the abbreviated picture of "rose," "iron," "rust," "cherry," and "flamingo." This is a proposition rather than a definition drawn up from a set of relations; it tells us what red means by giving us four different examples of ways in which it is manifested. Pound admits that language is metonymic, that is that it substitutes before it names. Eliot knew this; he simply lacked the confidence of his editor, who by 1922 had began to practice the idea in *The Cantos*.

Individual lines in *The Waste Land* illustrate Pound's method and Saussure's theory, as well if not better than does the overall form.

These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Shantih shantih shantih

The first thing to note is that the search for origins produces seemingly useless information. What are we supposed to think when an annotator, in this case Eliot himself, tells us that "Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe" comes from Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*: that "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" means "Give, sympathise, control," and that:

line 433: Shantih, repeated as here, is a formal ending to an Upanishad. 'The peace that passeth all understanding' is our equivalent to this word.

The information is true but it is like being told that red is a certain range of vibrations on the spectrum; we don't know what to make of it. Recognizing that there is a problem here, we may open a dictionary for a definition of "**Upanishad**," fetch a copy of Kyd's play, look at a second copy of *Collected Poems* so that we have the Notes constantly in front of us—and, balancing an embarrassing number of texts—still be no nearer an answer. The mistake is to try to make the

[7] Ezra Pound, *A.B.C. of Reading* (Faber, London, 1958), p. 19.

words go *back* to a meaning at all. Eliot himself hints that meaning as nomination has gone away: "Shantih . . .'The Peace which passeth understanding' is our equivalent to this word."

Take the single line "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata." The relation between these three words and how Eliot is using their differences tells us how to read them. Datta means Give, but if Eliot had written the line as "Give, Sympathise, Control" something very different would have happened. What difference is there between **Datta** and **Give**? Sound. The Sanskrit sounds older, more originally religious than English. But in the act of following up this hunch and saying Dayadhvam, with resonance, the problem of pronunciation springs to mind: to imitate a Hindu is to try to be like him and at the same time to hear our difference from him. The pull is in two directions; we want to fill the word with sonorous power but feel embarrassed. The difficulty is not the link between the word and the meaning ("sympathise" is after all given in the Notes and is not much help) but the link between us and the word, and the word and those that surround it. The line, like the poem, is about how language works.

Addie's section is at odds with all this. "The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name but a concept and a sound image" (p. 66). Saussure's insistence separates the word from its referent, and prepares the way for the shift of attention in modern linguistics from semantics which is the history of the origins of words, to syntax which is the study of how words relate to one another in their context—from the source of the word to how the word performs in relation to other words. Frederick Jameson calls this the implicitly "lateral" movement of the Saussurean model, a movement which deflects from "the whole question of the ultimate referents of the linguistic sign."[8] However, it should be added that Saussure's substitution of "concept" for referent and "sound–image" for name has a second and equally important effect—it is liable to dematerialize the external world. Addie resists both developments. She listens to other people's words going straight up in thin lines "quick," "harmless," and arbitrary; she watches as they decreate whatever it is they claim to name, but she will not accept what she sees and hears as evidence of necessary truths. Instead she talks about the "older" words, attempts to redeem a natural language and to protect it with

[8]Frederick Jameson, *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 32.

theology. Ideally Addie, by setting each word in a one to one relation with its ultimate referent, would cure the rupture language made in nature—restoring both to God. Or, to make use of the terminology of the linguistic philosopher, Jacques Derrida, she would link every signifier directly to "a transcendental signified" whose meaning would be located outside the system of linguistic difference.

Addie's theories are not without supporters among modern linguists. Indeed Jacques Derrida[9] accuses Saussure of committing just Addie's offense, when the Swiss linguist claims a privileged proximity to meaning for the spoken over the written word. Like Addie, the oralist grades words—by doing so he implies an inner life, or pre-expressive sense, to which speech is closer than print. Saussure argues that writing is a violence against the first, the spoken language of man. Derrida believes the distinction false because language is precisely the system where "the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences." There is no point of origin, no natural meaning, because sign "Anse" whether spoken or written differs from the man Anse. In his essay "Speech and Phenomena" Derrida defines this difference. Two things happen when a word is used; the user "differs," that is he expresses a distinction or a nonidentity with a thing; also he "defers," that is he imposes a delay, putting off until later the possible naming that is at present impossible. However, even here, origination is present in both Derrida's terms—"to differ" suggests a final affinity, which "to defer" will only delay. Saussure's reverence for oral words and Addie's claims for old words share a semireligious feel for the natural roots of language. This Derrida cannot dispel. Although signs *are* an arbitrary gathering of phonemes, the act of signification remains natural; for whether the user says "Anse" or writes "Anse" down, he is at least as likely to behave as if he is bridging a gap, as he is to believe that he is describing a schism.

Words then are both arbitrary and natural. Addie's riddle tries to

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973), particularly the essay, "The Voice That Keeps Silence." I am also indebted to an unpublished essay by Walter Michaels, "Displaced Persons: Derrida and the Modernists." While I disagree with the conclusion he reaches, I am thankful for his help both in this essay and in conversations about Derrida and Pound. Walter Michaels now teaches at John Hopkins University.

resolve the contradiction. I would suggest that the oral condition of Southern culture and the demagogic practice of fundamentalist faith makes her antagonistic toward the arbitrary principle that has caught the imagination of the twentieth-century artist. Addie insists that words have an origin; this she discovers in the silence that precedes sexuality.

Her adherence to an original version leads her to defeat, or at least to modify, her own sexuality: Anse/the phallus is murdered and pregnancy is aborted into the virgin birth. The cultural source of this location is the Calvinist myth—a myth that acts upon Addie, but one with which her creator spends a great deal of his career struggling. Faulkner accepts that words are female, but variously recombines their sexual and their linguistic elements, in an effort to mitigate a logic which must condemn the verbal artist to silence, and the female character to spinsterhood.

Feminine entanglement with the problematics of language extends far beyond *As I Lay Dying*; earth-women abound in Faulkner's fiction, not for random mythic purposes but because, no matter how monosyllabic, they make men talk. The absence of the absent-woman, a Caddy, an Addie, or a Temple Drake, is as effective in this as the monosyllables of Jenny Steinbauer, Eula Varner, and Lena Grove.[10] Language at its source is a temptation offered by the female. In addition, it is the primary medium for knowledge and therefore even for a lapsed Methodist is potentially criminal in expression as in source. This may explain why Faulkner sees a slight stain on consciousness, a stain which deepens the further a character moves from innocence and the more elaborate his thoughts become. The Faulknerian intellectual is male; he is a talker who, whether he knows it or not, talks endlessly about women. His pursuit of the subject leads him in two directions: he can become the comic (joining Janarius Jones, Fairchild, and Jason Compson) or the victim (along with Joe Gilligan, Gordon, and Quentin Compson). It is interesting that a second appearance by the comic guarantees his translation into the victim; witness the change in Horace Benbow between *Sartoris* and *Sanctuary* and the darkening humour of Gavin Stevens

[10]The two classifications are extreme; Faulkner will sometimes fuse silence and absence to reinforce his point—keeping Caddy's voice for the most part out of the second half of *The Sound and the Fury*, and sending Eula Varner to Texas for the aptly named "Long Summer" (Book 3) of *The Hamlet*.

from *The Town* to *The Mansion.* There is no movement in the opposite direction.

One sure alternative to the stain is silence. Certainly the mute fascinates Faulkner; a surprising number of characters silent by birth, inclination, or accident populate Yoknapatawpha. Addie would approve their silence and Faulkner often marks it with Christ-like features, ranging from the title that gives the early bellow of an unnamed idiot in "The Kingdom of God" a religious articulation, through Mahon's double paternity and Benjy's age, to Joe Christmas's initials. But a theological credential is a mixed blessing; all mutes are impaired mentally and some sexually—Mahon (impotent war victim), Benjy (castrated idiot), Tommy (murdered simpleton), Joe Christmas (castrated and lynched psychopath), Jim Bond (congenital idiot), Ike Snopes (idiot in love with a cow). It would seem from this list that Faulkner adheres to Addie's pattern, pairing silence with virginity and language with fertility, but that his emphasis is very different. When the price of innocent silence is such conspicuous suffering, it must be better to talk—even about women.

Equally numerous, but more problematic, is the silent central woman. Caddy, Addie, Temple, and Lena are, for very different reasons, given few words but each is the source of many. Their contradictory silence is as conspicuous as their contradictory virginity; each, again for different reasons, is seen as a virgin—Benjy and Quentin insist on their sister's innocence, and even Jason can only think of her sexuality at the risk of a headache; Addie tries to cancel out children and husband; the Jewish lawyer makes a case for Temple as a Southern virgin; and the common man, Bunch, earns his artist's name, Byron, in his efforts to deny Lena's nine–month pregnancy. In fact, each woman is either precociously sexual or inescapably fertile. Caddy and Temple are high class kept women. Addie is the mother of five and Lena, with only one child, clearly has a long way to go. The problem is yet another version of the riddle's equations, but the terms have been cross–coupled so that virginity is linked to fertility and silence to language. This absolute contradiction (present in Addie's psychic virginity) is hardly noticeable here because these women are mythic and their lack of a personal psychology allows them to blur rather than to raise contradictions. In *The Mansion* Faulkner plays his neatest trick on the Calvinist ethos and in so doing effects his most delicate piece of special pleading for

the innocence both of language and of the sexual woman: Linda Snopes is rendered almost silent by a Spanish bomb which damages her palate; however, Jefferson makes up all kinds of stories about her Spanish–Republican sympathies, while Gavin Stevens writes frantically on her note tablet. The same useful Spanish explosion kills her husband almost before he has arrived in the novel—an accident which leaves his young widow sexually mature and to all intents and purposes virginal. Linda is a quiet virgin in full possession of loud knowledge.

Clearly Faulkner is fascinated by the contradictory nature of language, but underneath all the variables what is he actually saying? Each recombination of Addie's equations shares two constants, a concern with the origin of words and a determination to declare that source a female place. Such a declaration made from within a Calvinist tradition, equates the fertility of language with sin, and it is this stain that Faulkner struggles to purify. Perhaps the most curious of his attempts to rewrite the Fall is his account of incest. Where language equals sin, it is not surprising that words at their most precocious will be associated with the more precocious aspects of sexuality. The artists of the early novels are often sexually deviant, the form of their deviancy being most consistently incestuous. It is possible to discover literary, historical, or personal reasons for this, to brand it "ill used inheritance" or "obsession." The poets of the 90's and the minor Symbolists turned language and sexual standards upside down in almost equal proportion. Faulkner did have an attractive stepdaughter. Both answers seem right, yet neither feels wholly satisfactory. The question remains; why should a man without a sister be so concerned with incest, and why should that concern involve extreme linguistic experimentation? Lévi-Strauss has constructed an analogy between kinship and language as sign systems.[11] He argues that despite its different manifestations among human groups, the incest taboo is the structural principle on which kinship is based. The circulation of women determines the shape of the family and so finally the shape of society. The taboo governing the circulation depends for its authority on a system of differentiating signs; for example, if there were no system of signs separating "sister" from "other than sister," a man might, after an absence of

[11] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*; particularly Part I, "Language and Kinship."

some years and by mistake, marry his sister; therefore, quite reasonably, matrimonial rules and language are one and the same thing—their source, the prohibition on incest. Lévi-Strauss does not deal with the universality or origin of taboo itself. In *The Scope of Anthropology* he acknowledges, without answering, Durkheim's belief that the institution exists in Western Societies only as an obsolete law, and recognizes, without incorporating the fact, that the harmful consequences of consanguinial unions are a recent discovery. If pushed, he might concede that the taboo, which is not found in the animal world, contains an element of coercion and that, therefore, the linguistic sign is an artificial division as well as original value—but Derrida would not be countenanced. The weight of Lévi-Strauss' thought provides language with a natural source in the incest taboo.

Despite its omissions, this hypothesis can be interestingly applied to Faulkner. The character who contemplates incest seeks to upset more than his parents—he challenges the terms of his own identity. Lévi-Strauss notes "the double identity of Oedipus, supposed dead and nevertheless living, condemned child and triumphant hero".[12] The remark has a wide application; the incestuous son wishes to be the father, as well as to be the child—the incestuous brother desires to be both lover and blood relation. Certainly Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* claims to have created his own father, while, in *Absalom, Absalom!* as the central narrator, he effectively does so. At the close of *Absalom, Absalom!* the same character doubles for the incestuously jealous brother (Henry Sutpen) and the father (Thomas Sutpen). In *As I Lay Dying*, Darl's clairvoyance multiplies him into Jewel and Dewey Dell; indeed his sister fears him as she might fear a rapist. Such escapes from the unity of identity are achieved because both the characters in question experiment with language, and their deconstruction of themselves is part of their separation of words from a semi-natural basis.

However, the deviant with his perverse words, stimulates Faulkner to a last-ditch redemptive effort. Incest was the Eden-crime. Edmund Leach makes the point with great clarity in his essay, "Genesis as Myth": "In order that immortal monosexual existence in Paradise may be exchanged for fertile heterosexual existence in reality . . . Adam must acquire a wife. To this end Adam must

[12] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology* (Cape, London, 1971), p. 15.

eliminate a sister."[13] At the gates of Eden one flesh, Adam and Adam's rib called Eve, had to become two fleshes. Since Genesis records no alternative partners, brother and sister became husband and wife, and the Biblical account ignores its own implication—that incest was committed in the marriage bed.

Incest was the first of many multiplications—one flesh/two fleshes, immortal/mortal, Eden/Earth, thing/word. It was the act that got man out of Eden into the world and as such it broke the silence in earnest. Language was no longer a God-given toy; it was instigated as a system of differences, where outside the garden difference would multiply, requiring words to keep pace with it. It is easy to see how the redemptive imagination might cast the incestuous hero as the champion of a monosexual Eden: attracted to his own blood he seeks to escape the social and sexual differences organized by language—and by recommitting the original sin to reapproach the original unity. Certainly Quentin and Darl, although they multiply themselves, do not go forth and multiply. The psychic union between sister and brother is not undertaken with children in mind; indeed Quentin contemplates self-emasculation, and Darl locked in Jackson is removed from temptation. Just as these characters do not procreate, so their linguistic creativity for all its ingenuity is finally impaired. Silence intrudes; Quentin prepares for suicide by clinically purging his rhetoric; Darl foaming "yes" is not only at a loss for words but has lost his voice. The redemptive twist is as labored as it is unconscious. However, its details are important in that they suggest that Addie's silent stories figure largely, if silently, in Faulkner's imagination. His use of incest is open to mythic explanation. Certainly in his works the crime often lacks an adequate psychological basis and still more strangely is without criminal stain. This is because it is the linguistic aspect of deviancy that intrigues Faulkner. Incest, for the Faulkner reader, whether or not he has access to the theology, feels like an innocent crime since inescapably in the sub–text it is *the* innocent crime.

Other perversions, though less consistently related to the central myth, reinforce the hero who desires to heal language. The incestuous brother is set outside social codes by his indulgence of additional sexual quirks; Quentin's latent ability to stimulate Shreve, coupled

[13] Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (Cape, London, 1971), p. 15.

with his fascinated memory of Versh's mutilation story,[14] establish an opposition to sexuality as fertility; Darl recalls an apparently casual moment of masturbation, and Joe Christmas shares in both his onanism and in Quentin's submerged homosexuality. More dramatically *Light in August* links the castration complex to silence with a lynching in which the removal of the male member confuses social language and stimulates a perversely potent jet of blood, "[it] seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket".[15] Jefferson will not easily account for the metamorphosis of a black phallus into a white phallus, and Faulkner's rhetoric celebrates the destruction of social codes as an obscurely religious triumph. The castrated man is potent because his ruined body has a positive place in the original myth of asexuality, and the siren wail that sounds at the end of the ritual "passes out of the realm of hearing" (p. 440), not just because it is unbearably loud, but because it marks the defeat of language, according to the old story.

At levels less perverse and more distinct, the carefully maintained bachelor status of the two major narrators of the triology and Ike McCaslin's recovery from the wire-noose of his wife's sexual caress in "The Bear" are socially defensible modes of dismemberment. Each of the three figures combines an escape from fertility with a restorative quest. Ratliff and Stevens between them purify the stories of the town; their constant revision of Snopes anecdotes sets words in the purer linguistic medium of oral discourse, whose constantly moving system of approximation disposes of words that do not adequately name. Moreover, Ratliff is a master of silence, and in *The Town* instructs his collaborator in its usage as the foundation of all careful discourse. More like Addie, Ike McCaslin pays off and hopes to cancel out the children of his grandfather's miscegenations; in addition, he refuses to benefit from the sale of the wilderness to timber companies whose locomotives penetrate his childhood garden–like snakes.

[14] William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1959), p. 114. "Versh told me about a man mutilated himself. He went into the woods and did it with a razor, sitting in a ditch. A broken razor flinging them backward over his shoulder the same motion complete the jerked skein of blood backward not looping. But that's not it. It's not having them then I would say O That That's Chinese I don't know Chinese."

[15] William Faulkner, *Light in August* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1960), p. 440.

Each example, whether masculine or feminine, repeats and reorganizes the terms of Addie's equations, in order to return language at least to a graduated purity. Faulkner shares, mistrusts, and modifies Addie's restorative impulse—an impulse that informs such seemingly diverse concerns as psychology, style, theology, and sexuality.