

The Legacy of a Failing Father: Dysfunctional Father Figures in William Faulkner's Fiction

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Chapter 1

A Living Past: Real People and Events that Influence and Reappear in William Faulkner's Fiction

After showing flashes of literary brilliance and understanding during his youth, William Cuthbert Faulkner struggled through many grueling years as a professional writer, eventually finding financial success through a few novels and his experience as a Hollywood scriptwriter. In his novels, he depicted the truth of man's sinful nature and apparent struggles within families and communities instead of a picturesque setting, and he transformed this imagery into an art form recognized by his readers and other authors. Yet, the intricacies and details of this art could not be pure imagination as it so closely relates to actual events and people; thus, as with nearly all of Faulkner's works, the setting, characters, and events resembled much of the same in Faulkner's life, presenting a vivid fictional account of reality. Maud and Murry Falkner never imagined on that September day of 1897 that their child would someday garner such attention as an author, nor did they realize that they and their family would serve as the basis for so much of his creative genius—using the well-known events of past and present, whether only known by his family or much of the region that they took place in, and placing these events in a literary setting, adding other elements to fabricate a fictional story with the often harsh realities of the South which allows readers to see a truth that they can connect with. This creative genius cannot be limited to just a few novels as many of the books provide a familiar rural, southern setting, many recurring characters, names, and themes. One theme that repeatedly arises and Faulkner often incorporates into his fiction is dysfunctional or absent father figures. Since so much of Faulkner's fiction derived from actual experience, Faulkner's perception of paternal figures, especially his own father Murry Falkner, must be one of considerable disapproval and distaste.

While many people do suffer from disconnected relationships with fathers that affect them, much of the aversion for Murry relates to Faulkner's admiration for his great-grandfather, Colonel William Falkner, who attained a considerable amount of success, especially compared to Murry's lack of success, as a lawyer, soldier, farmer, and writer. Notably, Murry Falkner's influence on William Faulkner should be considered as the primary source for Faulkner's failing, fictional paternal figures; yet, Faulkner's ancestors, family life, environment, and other relationships cannot be overlooked as each one provided key pieces to his writing.

Faulkner's desire to become a writer began early in his life as he admired a previous author in the family. Joseph Blotner, a close friend to Faulkner and writer of the illustrated edition of *Faulkner: A Biography*, notes that in the third-grade Faulkner claimed, "I want to be a writer like my great-granddaddy" (qtd. in Blotner 23). His great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, who dropped the "u" from the last name possibly because he did not want to be affiliated with another family of Faulkners, acquired an enthusiastic taste for reading and writing, and he carried this passion to his law studies. His first glimpse of success as a writer came when he wrote down the confession of the ax-murderer A.J. McCannon. After the townspeople, including Falkner, caught McCannon, he pled for them to hear his tumultuous life-story as an explanation for his uncivil actions; Falkner responded by making leaflets based on McCannon's accounts. Joel Williamson, writer of *William Faulkner and Southern History*, notes, "Not everyone would think that William's use of McCannon's end was seemly, but it revealed a character trait that marked his life. He recognized opportunities for self-advancement when he saw them, he acted quickly and boldly to make the most of every advantage" (17). The leaflets stayed the execution and exhibited Falkner's ability as a writer. Falkner's writing did not stop here as he later wrote novels (*The Spanish Heroine*, *The White Rose of Memphis*, *The Little Brick*

Church), a play (*The Lost Diamond*), and a long poem (*The Siege of Monterrey*). Out of his works, *The White Rose of Memphis*, which he wrote to revive circulation of the magazine the *Advertiser*, acquired a substantial amount of success in the public realm. The novel presents a voyage on a steamboat where a masquerade ball takes place; the only narrator, Ingomar, describes the events to the reader. In the first volume of his original version of *Faulkner: A Biography*, Blotner summarizes, “the scenes of courtroom injustice, the plight of the poor, the shootings and stabbings, the pickpockets, detectives, and gambling halls—all these might seem heightened if not overdrawn, but they had their bases in a reality which Falkner knew well” (38)¹. Falkner witnessed similar events during his life and used them in his literature. His ability to incorporate his life into his works also appeared in his autobiographical poem, *The Siege of the Monterrey*. Falkner’s use of life events as a basis for much of his writing influenced his great-grandson, William Faulkner, to do the same in his fiction.

While Faulkner respected his great-grandfather’s abilities and accomplishments as a writer, he remained in awe of his great-grandfather’s adventures. William Clark Falkner fought in the Mexican War and Civil War. At Manassas, Falkner served as the leader of his regiment, which was termed The Magnolia Rifles. Once his regiment merged with another, the men called him Colonel Falkner. He had the opportunity to receive a promotion to General, but he declined in order to remain with his men. His great-grandson thought highly of his high-ranking and respectable status, seeing his accomplishments in the service the mark of a man; however, William Faulkner did not attain this status himself despite some of his claims. His great-grandfather often became involved in altercations with other men, leading to violence and injuries for him and others. He killed one of his men, Robert Hindman, with a knife as Hindman attempted to shoot him; another man told Hindman that Falkner did not speak highly of him,

¹ The rest of the citations referring from Blotner will be from his original edition unless noted otherwise.

which enraged Hindman. Erasmus W. Morris, a friend of Hindman, argued with Falkner about renting a house, and in turn the argument erupted into a duel; it ended by a gunshot wound to Morris's head. Though Falkner found success in previous altercations in which he was acquitted of the crimes by jury, he did not escape a final altercation. Richard Thurmond, a former business partner of Falkner, became disgruntled after Faulkner bought out his half of the railroad. Blotner describes that Falkner claimed to have "killed enough men already and he was not going to shed anymore blood" (46). Though Falkner refused to fight, Thurmond delivered the fatal shot to Falkner in the street. William Faulkner acknowledged and revered the courage and bravery that Colonel Falkner displayed throughout his life, and the Colonel's life often appeared in Faulkner's fiction.

The young William Cuthbert Faulkner admired his great-grandfather's participation and courage in the Civil War as well as his passion for writing. William Clark Falkner often exemplified the chivalrous Southern soldier, fighting valiantly for what was a lost cause; his valiance inevitably led to his great-grandson's heroic perception of Falkner. In addition to his heroic endeavors, Falkner had success as a lawyer and a writer, leaving a substantial amount of material for the young and impressed Faulkner to use in his works. Blotner discusses the lasting impact of Faulkner's great-grandfather on the descendant he never met:

He saw in him a role-model of sorts: his own height at maturity, with features and carriage like his own. The Old Colonel did many things in his life, and if it was a career of tragedy mixed with triumph, it was a life which left its mark. . . . What the boy would extract from it was not the dashing figure of the Knight with the Black Plume but that of the writer. . . . The great-grandfather would give his

descendant priceless material for his work, and he in turn would confer upon his ancestor a kind of immortality. (28)

Faulkner admired his great-grandfather's interest in writing, and he used other events of William Clark Falkner's life as inspiration for his works, something that Faulkner would do with many other family members and friends.

The son of William Clark Falkner, John Wesley Thompson Falkner, did not hold the same desire for writing as his father had, but he still held an indirectly influential role in the life of his grandson. Interestingly, John was not raised by his father, William Falkner; his uncle, John Wesley Thompson, took responsibility for the Colonel's son and raised him. Colonel Falkner's wife died shortly after John Thompson Falkner was born, and his son's health began diminishing as well. Blotner reports that the Colonel asked John Thompson, "Will you keep the baby?" Thompson replied, "yes, on one condition—that you won't take him back if you remarry." The Colonel complied with Thompson's wishes; thus, the boy's name became John Wesley Thompson Falkner (17). This event does reappear in William Faulkner's *Pylon* as a young boy is left with a family relative upon the same agreement. The Colonel did remarry later, but he still had contact with his son, and John still inherited some of his father's wealth. John Falkner owned the railroad his father founded many years before. He gained considerable wealth from it until the economy faltered during the late nineteenth century, forcing him to sell the railroad, much to the dismay of his son Murry. Though he no longer owned the railroad, he maintained a considerable amount of success from his other professions: town alderman, state senator, businessman, and lawyer. William Faulkner admired his grandfather's success as a lawyer as it was a profession proudly assumed by each of his ancestors from John Wesley Thompson to John Falkner; however, this admirable tradition ended with Murry Falkner. As a

result of John's success and popularity in the town, his social life led him to heavy drinking. Williamson comments, "He was a social person, who belonged to an array of men's clubs. He was also a heavy drinker, and sometimes had to go away for the cure. In November, 1902, within weeks of Willie Falkner's arrival in Oxford to live, his grandfather checked into Crawford's Sanitarium in Memphis 'for treatment'" (144). His heavy drinking and multiple stays at rehabilitation centers proved to be a genetic tragedy that plagued Falkner men down the line. Though John Falkner's alcoholism resulted from his busy social life, other Falkner men would look to alcohol as an escape from hardships and stress instead of a social activity.

Though any alcoholism is unhealthy, drinking as a result of stress or depression proves to be significantly more serious. Murry Falkner, son of John Wesley Thompson Falkner, drank considerable amounts of alcohol as a result of his diminishing financial situation and other stress related situations. One utterly disappointing aspect of Murry's life that he dwelled upon for a significant portion of his life was losing the railroad that his father sold: "The railroad was the centerpiece of his life and the foundation of his self-respect. Uncertainly, falteringly, he sought to save it. . . . Murry went to Corinth about financing to buy the road himself. The banker. . . treat[ed] the matter as a joke" (Williamson 143). This remains the pivotal moment in Murry Faulkner's life; he lost the position of wealth and respect that he did not reacquire later in his life as he nomadically traveled from job to job, leaving him with a consistent taste of failure. Blotner states, "Murry had the family taste for [drinking], and he must have turned to it not only for pleasure but for solace from past disappointments and present problems. Sometimes he would be unable to contain himself. . . . [Maud] detested whiskey—what it did to her husband and to the family" (17-18). On several occasions, Maud transported Murry to the Keeley Institute—the same place his father visited many times before—for "the cure." Murry's drunken state and

unpredictable behavior were clearly visible to young Faulkner and his brothers; therefore, in an effort to deter the boys from this behavior when they became older, Maud Falkner took the boys with her as she had Murry committed to the rehabilitation center. These trips were meant to be lessons about the effects of alcohol, but the boys enjoyed their time traveling on the railroad and in streetcars. Blotner asserts, “The sight of a drunken father could hardly have failed to make some impression, but it did not serve to keep [the boys] from drinking heavily in later life. The example worked in just the opposite way from what Maud Faulkner intended” (18).

Consequently, Murry’s sons drank significant amounts of alcohol as adults; arguably, William’s alcoholism was the worst of the brothers.

As William Faulkner’s financial burdens and other struggles mounted, he too turned to alcohol as a mode of comfort. Williamson comments that Faulkner drank large amounts of alcohol as his predecessors had done before him, especially while writing. This frequent event led to his eventual “collapse,” something quite common for him during his drinking spells. He often drank during stressful times, including when he began taking in more dependents: his mother when his father died, his brother’s (Dean) wife and child, and other servants and family members who were in and out of his life. Faulkner lamented that he was the “oldest son to widowed mothers and inept brothers and nephews and wives and other female connections and their children, most of whom I don’t like and with none of whom I have anything in common . . . War was appealing to men, it’s the only condition under which a man who is not a scoundrel can escape for a while from his female kin” (qtd. in Williamson 266). Though he disliked taking in so many family members, his status as the oldest child overruled his feelings, and he felt obligated to care for the others. This inescapable role led to his remark about war; since female family members typically look to the oldest male for financial support when their husband dies,

he felt that a man could honorably maintain his status as the head of the house without being concerned with multiple family members at home by going to war. Since Faulkner did not officially go to war at any point in his life, he continued to loathe his role as the eldest Faulkner. Both the influx of dependents and his alcoholism are arguably the inescapable fate inherited by Faulkner from his father. His desire for alcohol during stressful or depressing times was his choice, but it was a choice he learned from his father.

Several factors caused the tension and separation between Murry Falkner and William Faulkner. Murry displayed a quiet and isolated personality on many occasions. Blotner says, "Though he was a straightforward young man, he was often gruff and inclined to silence" (7). Typically, this behavior would be much more prominent in the public realm and not quite so apparent in the private setting of the home; however, Murry maintained his silent nature around his own family. Blotner continues, "Much of the time there would be a wall between them. At the table, vigorously eating the fried foods he loved, he would be silent until he put down his napkin" (18). This perspective of Murry's silent nature did not solely come from William, the son holding resentment for his father, but Jack, the beloved son, noticed this isolated characteristic as well: "[I realized] how little I actually came to know him, and perhaps, even less to understand him. He was not an easy man to know; his capacity for affection was limited" (qtd. in Blotner 18). Murry's perpetual silence consequently led to what some have deemed "excessive" closeness between Maud and the boys; Murry's isolated behavior led the boys to gain the attention of their mother and strengthen their relationship with her. Blotner writes, "All the Falkner boys were too close to their mother; they were emotionally tied to her" (19). Though Murry maintained his distant and separated relationship, he continued to interact with the boys in the form of discipline. Murry provided a strict discipline, especially with William, "who gave

him the most trouble,” according to family friend Bob Farley (Blotner 31). Murry maintained a disciplinary role, but he failed to be close and personable with his sons, leaving Faulkner with an even more distant and disconnected relationship with his father than his brothers, which would continue into his writing.

William Faulkner tended to be disciplined more harshly than his brothers because he was the oldest son. Blotner says, “He was the oldest, and older children traditionally are made to bear more responsibility than younger ones, at least in their early years. And it is axiomatically difficult for them to compete with babies, particularly if some aspect of their earliest days and months is precarious, as was the case with Jack and would be the case with the fourth of the Falkner boys” (19). Because of this added pressure and the complications of competing with younger siblings, Faulkner resorted to “earn love in different ways, both by conventional gifts and gifts of achievement” (Blotner 19). This sense of garnering attention through achievement would become most apparent during William Faulkner’s writing career. As the pressures of being the eldest and holding the most responsibility mounted, other factors played a significant role in the growing tension between father and son.

Faulkner detached himself from Murry more as he grew older, and his brothers seemingly became more favored by Murry. When the fourth Falkner son, Dean Swift Falkner, was born, Maud and Mammie Callie focused more on him and lessened their focus on the other three boys: “[they] were now freer than they ever had been before to follow their own pursuits” (Blotner 30). After the focus shifted more to Dean, “It was no wonder that the silence which people saw as characteristic of his father would become a trait consonant with elements of his own psyche” (Blotner 31). Faulkner continued to separate himself from his parents, exploring his new freedom as their concentration was more on Dean instead of the older children. Also, he isolated

himself from his brothers and friends at times because of the lack of intellectual communication he sought: “He loved his mother and his brothers, but he must have felt an increasing intellectual distance between them. And apart from Estelle and Stone and Wasson—perhaps a few others—there was no one with whom he could communicate on any deeper level” (Blotner 52).

Faulkner’s isolation was not just a result of his struggle for attention from his parents, but it was also a result of his choice to pursue this higher intellectual thought, something that Murry did not care for.

Faulkner’s younger siblings and their characteristics remained a noteworthy factor in the relationship strain between his father and him. Blotner describes, “Jack was taller, Johncy was better-looking, and Dean was a sunny, happy-go-lucky child petted by everyone. Now [William], the eldest, was indicating, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, that there were certain family standards to which he did not intend to conform. Murry Falkner must have found it increasingly hard to understand him” (51). Murry struggled to understand him, and this confusion fueled the beginning of Murry’s distaste for his son. Williamson clarifies, “After a time, however, his father manifested a measure of dislike for his oldest son. Perhaps with a touch of malice, certainly with cruel effect, he called the boy ‘Snake Lips’” (166). The reference of “Snake Lips” draws attention to William’s thin lips, a Butler trait. Also, Faulkner was about five and a half feet tall, relatively small compared to nearly all of the other men in his family who were recognized as tall during this time who were approximately six feet tall. Faulkner’s physical attributes did not match any of the other Falkner men with the exception of a long nose, leaving him with a sense of isolation from the Falkner line. This physical difference only fueled his desire to be apart from the family and his home. Williamson continues, “Making matters infinitely worse, Murry apparently turned special favor upon his second son Jack” (166). His

physical characteristics and his father's unkindness towards him compounded over time, leading him to defend his ways against his father's wishes.

Despite his distant nature, William did not shy away from conflict with his father. Faulkner understood that his father wanted him to conform to his ways—heeding to his father's advice, finding a job with a reliable income, and respecting him—and to leave his pursuit of writing and literature, and each time conflict arose, he did not back down. Blotner points out that “[William] [was] unable to see [Murry's] good points and meet him with affection as Jack could. Billy seems to have taken no pains to avoid conflict and to have gone out of his way to affront him” (40). This can easily be seen when Faulkner did not run from his father on a golf course as a classmate, Watson Campbell, recalls that William, Jack, and he were playing golf when Murry, who was angry and yelling at them, came in their direction. Jack and Watson ran while William continued golfing without flinching. He struck the ball towards his charging father (Blotner 51). William's rebellious and unwillingness to conform to Murry's disciplinary actions did not help the strained relationship between father and son, nor would it help Murry approve of William's passion for writing.

As Faulkner and his brothers grew older, the distance between him and his father increased. Jack and Murry shared a true fondness while Murry remained proud of his highly successful athletic sons, Johncy and Dean. As for William, nothing common or shared seemed to exist between his father and him. Blotner comments on their relationship: “[William's] situation at home was no better. His mother's love was constant, and his brothers still admired him, but he was spending less time in the home where his father had given up trying to understand this young man who now even spelled his name differently from his own on some of the pictures he drew and some of the things he wrote” (73). Murry could not understand his son,

mainly because of his inability to recognize his son's passion and soon-to-be choice of career as credible or successful. Murry could not understand William because he wanted William to choose a more respectable career. As a result, "[William] responded to paternal rejection by rushing to perfect alienation from home and family—always excepting his mother" (Williamson 166). Faulkner found this "perfect alienation" by not performing well at school, not because he did not want to but because he chose not to do anything. He knew he was smart, but he refused to show this through any work, detaching himself from the rest of the class. Murry's paternal rejection is another reason Faulkner admired his great-grandfather as Jay Martin, author of "Faulkner's 'Male Commedia': The Triumph of Manly Grief," admits; "His great-grandfather may have had a special appeal as a model because the boy had no success in attracting his father's admiration; and little William, it seemed, was not disposed to admire his father who provided anything but a male model for him" (147). Murry's severe lack of being a role model for his son reemerges in the dysfunctional father figures of William's novels. William continued moving away from people, especially his family, through his actions. He began "smoking with a pipe, reading poetry," and using certain phrases that revealed his desire to be affiliated with a higher social status (Williamson 185). Williamson reports, "As an adolescent, [William] was becoming, it seemed, such a person as few Falkners had ever aspired to be and no Falkner had ever been. Tentatively, he was building an answer both to an earthy, manly Murry and to his high-achieving, community-serving, brick-throwing grandfather" (185). Obviously, Faulkner's path was not traveling parallel with that of his ancestors, nor was it even in the same direction. The resentment he held for his father was also a result of Murry's inconsistent job status: "The vicissitudes of his father's business career never threatened the integrity of family life, and friends thought of him as a fine man in his own right, but Bill Falkner was still the son of a man

rather often regarded as the unfortunate offspring of a brilliant father, a prodigious cyclical drinker shifting from one business to another without much success” (Blotner 52). The gap became greater each time Murry showed any disgust towards Faulkner’s choices, especially in Faulkner’s passion for reading and writing literature.

The more than apparent differences between Murry and William increased as William grew older. Blotner describes Murry as “[a] man’s man in many ways[.] [He] preferred hunting camp to Camp Meeting, and he vastly preferred the ‘Club House’ in the Tallahatchie bottom to the Falkner cottage near the tabernacle” (17). As William grew older, his tastes for hunting and other “manly” gatherings decreased; he desired intellectual conversations at a table and smoking with a pipe. The most blatant example of Faulkner and his father’s different tastes could be seen when the two shared a common interest of smoking, but in a significantly different way:

On one occasion Murry Falkner made an overture when the two sat on the front galley.

“I understand you smoke now,” he said.

“Yes sir,” his son answered.

“Here,” his father said, reaching into his pocket. “Try a good cigar.”

“Thank you, sir,” he said. Pulling out his pipe, he broke the cigar in half, stuffing one half into the pipe and the other into his pocket. The son would remember the incident for the rest of his life. “He never gave me another,” he said. (Blotner 52)

Smoking represents the common link between Murry and William since it was a man’s activity during this time; however, the difference of how each one smoked shows the significant distinction between their tastes. Murry’s cigar represents the “manly man’s” way of smoking

tobacco. It was a symbol of rugged manhood as well as a reflection of a middle social class. Faulkner used the pipe, signifying a more distinguished and “clean” way of smoking tobacco. The fact that Murry never gave William another cigar also symbolizes the one chance he gave William before he ceased trying to understand him; Murry moved on to the second son, Jack, once he realized William would not conform to his tastes.

Despite Faulkner’s differences, Maud continued to love her son unconditionally while Murry continued to reject him. This strained relationship between father and son may have caused some incidents between Maud and Murry, but for the most part, William and his father kept the tension between them. Blotner states, “There is no evidence that he saw [Murry] as a rival for Maud Falkner’s love, and his shrewd observation could not have missed the behavior which must have revealed Maud Falkner’s reservations about her husband. . . .For his father, he would eventually develop a kind of tolerance and understanding, but these qualities, too, would await a distant future day” (40). The tolerance Faulkner would have for his father more than likely occurred at some point during his writing career; however, his recollections of his father’s actions, rejection, and attitude towards him played an important part in his writing.

While Murry often neglected Faulkner and treated him with indifference, Faulkner looked to his mother and other people close to him, which led to his passion for literature. Faulkner chose writing as a result of his story-laden childhood and his mother and Damuddy’s passion for drawing and writing. Since Murry maintained his silent nature and did not connect with William and the other boys on a daily basis, the boys grew attached to Maud, Damuddy, and Mammie Callie. Damuddy retained a desire for drawing and had passed on an opportunity to travel to Rome to study art so that she could stay with Maud and help her with the boys. The other factor that contributed to Faulkner’s infatuation with literature was the numerous stories

told by Mammie Callie, his grandfather, and Damuddy; each of their stories maintained a sense of history and truth, as they had experienced the event or had the story passed down to them. Blotner claims, "Pretending was often fused with history for the Falkner boys" (21). This history-laden storytelling without a doubt influenced Faulkner's writing style later in his life as he incorporated many of the people, events, and stories that he heard or experienced during his life into his books. Mammie Callie spent more time with the boys than almost anyone else, and she entertained them with stories. Blotner remarks that "[t]hough she could not read or write, she had a fund of stories about old times before the war, and the days afterward too. . . . The boys loved her stories and they loved her" (13). Though Mammie Callie had quite a number of stories for the boys, William desired more. Williamson concludes, "In particular, Billy liked to elicit Civil War stories from his grandfather who, as a teenager, had seen firsthand a lot of the action in Tippah County and environs" (167). As a result of this exposure to so many stories, Faulkner's imagination continued to grow: "One of the children remembered the way Billy could make do like Damuddy, his imagination seizing on whatever they could find as he led the group in improvisation" (Blotner 21). Faulkner would use many of the same stories told by Mammie Callie, John Falkner, and others in his future works, blending fiction with reality. With this immense exposure to the true details of history laid within the art of story-telling, Faulkner developed the ability to place truth and history in fiction, including his thoughts on his father's role in his life.

William's story-telling abilities improved with time, and he found that he was quite successful at telling stories as well as mixing truth with fiction. Blotner remarks that Maud remembered when young William's chores included carrying two pales of coal to their home from the shed. Consistently, a young boy named Fritz was seen by Maud doing William's

chores, noticing William speaking the entire time. She realized that he was telling Fritz tales each day in order for him to return to do his chores another day (35). Faulkner's talent of storytelling expanded to the unique ability to captivate an audience without their knowing if the story were true or not. His cousin, Sallie Murry, recalls, "It got so that when Billy was telling you something, you never knew if it was the truth or just something he'd made up" (qtd. in Blotner 35). Faulkner's talent created a great amount of confusion amidst his friends and family. For example, he told his family via letters that he had gained weight shortly after arriving to boot camp in the Royal Air Force as a result of their training, but a picture discovered later exhibited a scrawny Faulkner in baggy clothing. Also, Blotner documents William's many versions of crashing in flying school: he broke his nose in an airplane accident, injured his leg in a crash, he crashed through the roof of a hanger and hung from the rafters, and then he hung from the rafters with a friend while they attempted to drink alcohol hanging (64). Each of these stories was told to a different person close to Faulkner and supposedly referred to the same incident. Faulkner's creative genius, which is something Phil Stone noticed early in Faulkner's life, allowed him to incorporate real events and family members, such as Murry, into his fiction.

Phil Stone, a law student and literature aficionado who served as a literary surrogate father to the lost and alienated Faulkner, met William through a mutual friend, Katrina Carter. William had yet to meet someone in Oxford who could carry an intellectual conversation about literature, poetry, and writing with him until he met Phil. Stone read Faulkner's writing and became an immediate fan of the promising young writer. He introduced Faulkner to numerous works of literature he was not yet familiar with such as Keats and Swinburne. Stone notes, "There was no one but me with whom William Faulkner could discuss his literary plans and hopes and his technical trials and aspirations. True greatness was in creating great things and not

in pretending them; the only road to literary success was by sure, patient, hard intelligent work” (qtd. in Blotner 45). Blotner goes on to discuss that “the relationship was pervasive—intellectual, aesthetic, social—and long-lasting, and it came at a crucial time in Billy Faulkner’s life” (46). Reading and comprehending at a level beyond the mere enjoyment of reading that his mother and some of his friends shared, and his father not retaining any appreciation for literature, Faulkner lacked the guidance of an older, more experienced student of literature at this point in his life; he needed someone to foster and develop his taste for literature and his writing. Stone assumed the surrogate father role, providing a solid paternal figure he felt he lacked and helping Faulkner expand his mind and experience the world outside of his hometown. Faulkner visited Stone at college and made a few trips to New York after being encouraged to leave by Phil. Stone deepened Faulkner’s knowledge of literature and writing and helped Faulkner to find his way in the literary world.

As a result of Faulkner’s exposure to so many stories, to his own experiences, to Phil Stone’s tutelage, and his own impressive imagination, William Faulkner manipulated reality and fiction, mixing the two into entertaining works of art. Faulkner’s strained relationship with his father became an element of his entertaining novels, and it served as a common ground for his readers to see themselves in the same, real situations. Blotner comments, “The line between reality and imagination was not as compelling for him as it was for others” (66-67). Though this may be hard to realize, Faulkner often believed that worthy and entertaining writing derived from three main elements: imagination, observation, and experience. Not one of the three could be excluded nor could just one exist; all three exist together and are inseparable. Faulkner never denied experience or observation in his writing, and he acknowledged that they were present in his works; however, he would not admit to the connections of his fictional characters and events

to those whom he actually knew in real life. Though Faulkner would not admit to the connections, this does not discount the validity of such a connection since so many of the characters and the situations in his literature parallel the actual events he witnessed or heard about. His refusal to admit any of these links also contributes to his skewed line between imagination and reality; Faulkner did not want to reveal what is or is not real in his literature, leaving the reader to make his or her own assumptions.

A majority of the stories that family and friends told William Faulkner appear in similar fashion in his own novels. Many of the names of people he encountered in the town of Oxford reappear as the names of his characters, and many of the events in his life recur as those in his fiction. Undeniably, Faulkner utilized what he knew, saw, and heard to create his novels; thus, his experiences and strained relationship with his father, Murry Falkner, cannot be ignored when considering significant influences apparent in his works. Notably, dysfunctional or absent father figures are a common occurrence in his books; the same remained true for Faulkner's real life as his father was either absent or not assuming the traditional paternal role expected of men during his time. On August 7, 1932, Murry Falkner passed away due to heart failure, and Faulkner assumed responsibility for caring for his mother and his father's debts. Though Murry Falkner died in 1932, his characteristics and essence continue to live on through the fictional characters in many of William Faulkner's books, providing an insight into the lasting impression that was left on William by his father.

Chapter 2

Abandoned Children

After struggling with *Absalom, Absalom!*, William Faulkner temporarily left it and began writing another novel, *Pylon*. Atypical of traditional Faulkner works, *Pylon*'s setting does not reflect the rural setting of Yoknapatawpha County or the names related to his fiction such as Sutpen, Snopes, and Compson. The book served as a break for Faulkner from *Absalom, Absalom!* and as a quick mode for much needed income during his writing career; he needed a novel to be published in order to make money while taking a break. Writing freely with only creating a book for profit in his mind, he tapped his passion and appreciation of flying to create this story. His interest and knowledge for aviation becomes quite apparent through the pages of flying races, terminology, and the description of the planes. His more popular novels of Yoknapatawpha County do not hold any major references to aviation, which can probably be attributed to the untimely and tragic death of his much beloved younger brother as well as the lack of influence of aviation on the region as a whole. Dean Swift Falkner died in a plane crash in the same year that *Pylon* was published, disheartening Faulkner and his passion for aviation. Despite the unique context regarding aviation in *Pylon*, this novel still provides evidence of Faulkner's mind and style, including the theme of the dysfunctional father figure.

Several characters play pivotal roles in the intricate web of relationships that project the effects of absent father figures. The character that provides the reader with the most information and not unbiased accounts of what happens is the reporter. He attends an air show with the intentions of writing about the events that take place; however, he becomes distracted and ultimately obsessed with a group consisting of a young woman, a pilot, a parachutist, and the woman's child. This obsession proves to be a rather dysfunctional relationship with the other

four characters and ends with the tragic death of Roger Shumann, the pilot, and the severing of the reporter's relationship with the woman—Laverne, her lover—Jack, and the child—Jack Shumann. The effects of an absent father figure are seen through the reporter, Laverne, and Jack Shumann since their relationships with their fathers cause them to act in different ways.

Nearly no information about the reporter's father is given throughout the novel except that his mother has been married to two other men before, neither being acknowledged as his biological father. Reynolds Price, author of the introduction to the 1968 Signet Modern Classic publication of *Pylon*, best describes the reporter and his history with a brief statement:

This, I think, is the anatomy of *Pylon*: a young man, age twenty-eight (born on April Fool's Day, the son of a multi-husbanded mother) who will remain nameless to us (the name by which the other characters know him is apparently a pseudonym), is a newspaper reporter and has been assigned by his impatient but paternal editor to cover an airshow being held to celebrate the opening of a city airport in a thinly-disguised New Orleans during Mardi Gras. (ix)

The most interesting portion of this statement must be the title given to the mother of the reporter as “multi-husbanded mother.” Note that the central figure in raising the reporter is the mother, and Price's comment brings attention to the unstable father figure in the reporter's life. The absence of a consistent father figure for the reporter becomes known when he makes some comments to his boss, Hagood, about his mother's upcoming wedding: “Hagood spoke again, ‘I see. Yes. Am I to congratulate you?’ ‘Thanks,’ the reporter said. ‘I don't know the guy. But the two I did know were o.k.’ ‘I see,’ Hagood said. ‘Yes. Well. Married. The two you did know. Was one of them your— But no matter. Don't tell me. Don't tell me!’ he cried (80). The reporter can describe the other two men in his mother's life only as “good”; this shows the

lack of connection and relationship between the reporter and a father figure. He also presents a lack of interest or sincerity when discussing them or even mentioning the one his mother is about to marry. Knowing that the reporter lacks the paternal figure in his life, Hagood attempts to salvage the conversation with a positive note: “Anyway, she did what she could for you! It will change your life some now” (80). The reporter replies, “Well, I hope not. I don’t reckon she has done any worse this time than she used to” (80). Obviously, the reporter’s mother raised him; whereas a father figure remained absent a majority of the time since he mentions his mother’s role as the only parent. While this discussion between the reporter and Hagood appears to be a side note of little importance in the overall picture of the story, it actually presents a rather important piece to the understanding of the reporter’s actions throughout the story.

As a result of the reporter’s inadequate relationship with any paternal figure, the reporter’s actions and statements shed light on his struggle to understand the role of a father as well as his need for a father figure. Later in the novel, the reporter and Hagood have another conversation about the reporter’s mother, but this time the conversation occurs after she is married to the new man. The reporter hands a postcard to Hagood and says, “Read it. It’s from mamma. Where they are spending their honeymoon, her and Mr. Hurtz. She said how she has told him about me and he seems to like me all right and that maybe when my birthday comes on the first of April. . .” (192). Based on what the reporter says, he and his mother’s new husband have never met before, and he remains excited about the news that Mr. Hurtz “likes” him based on his mother’s description. Typically, children from previous marriages hesitate to accept a new parental figure or other family member as a result of marriage; however, the reporter has a positive reaction about Mr. Hurtz, revealing a lack of a significant connection with a paternal figure.

Also, the conversations between Hagood and the reporter show the reporter's search for a paternal figure while he is away from home. Since he does not have a significant father figure, Hagood's relationship with the reporter goes a little beyond that of employer and employee to the realm of a surrogate father relationship. The first instances of interaction between Hagood and the reporter reveal a solid business relationship as the reporter excitedly tells Hagood about Shumann, Laverne, Jack, and the boy while Hagood sternly instructs him to avoid this story since it is more imaginative than real information people want to hear.

The second meeting between the two reveals a small taste of the transition from a business discussion to the father-child relationship between them. The reporter asks Hagood for an advance on his weekly pay, explaining that it is needed for a wedding gift for his mother. Hagood complies and provides him with the money; however, Hagood discovers that the money he lent the reporter is in fact not going to the reporter's mother, to which he replies, "'Get out of here!'" (80). He then provides the reporter with a slip of paper and begins to explain, "'It's a hundred and eighty dollars,' Hagood said in the tense careful voice, as though speaking to a child. 'With interest at six percent, per annum and payable at sight. Not even on demand: on sight. Sign it'" (80). Though this action seems to be mostly business, it is in fact a bit personal since Hagood is attempting to force the reporter to learn a lesson and take care of his adult responsibilities. Faulkner carefully chooses to use the words "as though speaking to a child" to acknowledge that the reporter has not assumed an adult role though his position as a reporter should be an adult one, leaving him lost in transition.

The third and fourth conversations between Hagood and the reporter provide a much more personal relationship between the two. The reporter approaches Hagood in his office again and asks for "fifty dollars" (134). Hagood complies, giving the reporter the money, but this time

he does not hold him to such a strict payment plan. The reporter asks if he needs to sign anything as he did last time, and Hagood responds, “No. Go home and go to bed. That’s all I want” (135). The setting of the office remains the only element resembling the business realm while the lending of fifty dollars without signing a promissory note and showing concern for the reporter’s welfare depicts a strong shift to a more personal realm. After Shumann’s death and near the end of the reporter’s relationship with the group, the reporter approaches Hagood on the golf course to ask for money again. The setting change adds to the new perception of their relationship as the reporter approached Hagood in his office on the two previous occasions, but now he finds Hagood at a place of leisure where employees typically do not approach their employers for money; however, a more personal relationship allows for the reporter to approach Hagood on the golf course. Hagood asks the reporter the amount that he would like, but the reporter simply states that “[w]hatever you can” will suffice (192). He continues, “Will. I know I have borrowed more from you than I have paid back. But this time maybe I can,” handing Hagood the postcard from his mother regarding her new husband’s supposed interest in her son (192). Hagood gives the reporter a check; each of these “loans” reveals Hagood as the paternal figure that provides the reporter with the money he needs even though the reporter has not fulfilled the work that is required of him. These actions are considered bad business practice as the employer begins paying the employee for work not yet completed; thus, these actions exist in the realm of a surrogate father more than that of business. Interestingly, Murry Faulkner partially fulfilled this role for Faulkner when William left the military; Murry supplied his son with money but seemingly nothing else. James Watson, author of “My Father’s Unfailing Kindness,” confirms, “Murry Faulkner financed a good bit of his eldest son’s travel to and from Oxford from 1918 through 1925, contributed to his support while he was away, and housed and

fed him between times” (757). Watson goes on to discuss that Faulkner’s relationship was more than financial because Faulkner saw Murry as the “head of the household” (757). However, Faulkner’s mere acknowledgement of Murry as the father of the house does not reflect the animosity that numerous biographers and critics note William had for his father. Faulkner’s relationship with his father was financial, which is the same relationship that exists between Hagood and the reporter. Hagood continues to instruct the reporter: “Go to town and look in the book and find where Doctor Legendre lives and go out there. Don’t telephone; go out there; tell him I sent you, tell him I said to give you some pills that will put you to sleep for about twenty-four hours, and go home and take them. Will you?” (193). Not only does Hagood provide the reporter with the money he needs, he also shows concern for the reporter’s health, another area typically outside of the business realm. Hagood’s actions have progressed from a strictly business role in the first conversation, to a moment of transition in the second conversation, to a more surrogate father role in the final conversation while the reporter accepts this relationship without any objections.

The reason for Hagood’s progressive paternal relationship with the reporter is that he recognizes the reporter as someone who needs guidance similar to a child. Most of this perception of the reporter relates to his work relationship with him, but part of the perception is attributed to Hagood’s knowledge of the reporter being raised by his mother and the lack of a father figure in his life. Hagood restrains himself from asking the reporter about the relationship between the reporter and his mother’s two previous husbands (80). Hagood realizes that the reporter probably does not know which one is his biological father; thus, he avoids the subject and continues to help the reporter. As noted before, Hagood provides instructions to the reporter on how to pay back what he owes in a similar way to speaking to a child. A year and a half later,

Hagood and Jiggs are talking in the street when Jiggs hears Hagood mention the reporter's name. After Jiggs questions what he hears, Hagood responds, "It's his last name. Or the only name he has except the one initial as far as I or anyone else in this town knows. But it must be his; I never heard of anyone else named that and so no one intelligent enough to have anything to hide from would deliberately assume it. You see? Anyone, even a child, would know it to be false." Jiggs asserts, "Yair. Even a kid wouldn't be fooled by it" (81). Both Hagood and Jiggs acknowledge that the reporter's name is so odd and rare that only a child could be gullible enough to believe it to be a real name; thus, even though they never mention the reporter's name, the reporter must be seen as a naive and vulnerable person to not notice the awkwardness of his own name. It is not enough to merely say that the reporter retains a child-like vulnerability because his name remains so strange to two other characters. Faulkner places key information later in the novel that heightens the reader's awareness of the reporter's child-like mentality. The reporter instructs Hagood to read the post card from his mother, and he begins to explain that he may receive a gift from his mother and her new husband "when [his] birthday comes on the first of April" (192). If Faulkner merely wanted to mention that the reporter might receive a gift on his birthday, then he would not need to mention the date because the reporter's gullible nature in believing he will receive a gift on his birthday from the mother he does not see and the man he never met remains quite apparent; however, Faulkner does add the date of the reporter's birthday which adds to the susceptibility of the reporter. The reporter's mother marries for a third time, and none of the previous men have played a significant paternal role in his life. The postcard from his mother that mentions the possibility of a gift on his birthday—April Fool's Day—suggests that the reporter will be fooled into believing he can have a significant relationship with her new husband, again; the mother only mentions a gift, but one does not arrive during the

novel. The significance of the birthday aligning with April Fool's Day and the reporter's positive response to the postcard signals Faulkner's intentions for him to be perceived as naive.

Since the reporter struggles to find a paternal figure in his own life, he cannot fulfill the role of a surrogate father for the young Jack Shumann. Though the young boy has two father figures, Roger and the older Jack, neither provides the complete attention nor assumes the father role in a completely functional manner; their focuses and interests do not reflect that of a father, who typically shows the most concern and interest in his children. This is most evident at the end of the novel after Roger Shumann's death when Laverne and the older Jack leave the child with Shumann's father, enabling them to carry on their relationship and abandoning their parental roles. Roger focuses on flying and Laverne while the older Jack focuses on money and Laverne; both men do have a relationship with young Jack, but the relationship remains a superficial one at most. Also, two men not fully assuming the paternal role for young Jack is the reason for young Jack's consistent need for a father figure throughout the novel. The men's focus on Laverne and hers on them reveals that their role as fathers is secondary to their own desires, especially since they do not know who is the biological father between the two. Though the reporter begins to pay attention to the child initially, he eventually shows a strong affection for Laverne instead of a desire for the welfare of the group. He offers to buy candy for the boy to keep him happy when he first meets Laverne and the boy at the air show (34). This small gift is the reporter's attempt to gain the attention of Laverne by pleasing the child. By the end of the novel, his focus is completely on Laverne, and his relationship to the boy seems to be superficial just like that of the other two men. Laverne would not accept the reporter's offer of paying for the transportation of Shumann's body; thus, the reporter devises a plan to hide the money in a toy airplane and give it as a gift to young Jack. Though it appears that the reporter gives the boy a

gift, the true purpose of the present is to provide Laverne with the money. The reporter's true intentions are to help Laverne and gain her favor, not to make the boy happy, revealing his insincere relationship with young Jack. The reporter's attempt to provide Laverne with money also represents the reporter's effort to replace Shumann.

The reporter keeps borrowing money from Hagood to help the others with financial needs; however, this is a vain attempt by the reporter to buy Laverne's attention and love while possibly moving into a role of the provider in place of Shumann. When Laverne expresses that they are in need of money or a place to stay, the reporter quickly finds the money and offers his own place as a temporary residence for them. While this assistance appears innocent at first, he continues to give her money. He tries to provide for her and young Jack after Shumann's death, attempting to assume Shumann's place as the provider for them. This financial assistance also presents part of Jacques Lacan's symbolic father in Faulkner's novel. The symbolic father is not any person but rather a position, one that represents the law and provision a father provides in a family. The reporter begins stating his desire, in a semi-serious manner, to Shumann about having a relationship with Laverne as Shumann and Jack do now. He states, "I think about how it's you and him and how maybe sometimes she don't even know the difference, one from another, and I would think how maybe if it was me too she wouldn't even know I was there at all" (132). Shumann answers, "You'll have me thinking you are ribbing me up in this crate of Ord's so you can marry her maybe" (132). Shumann may passively comment on the possibility of the reporter's intentions to set him up for death, but the intentions seem to be real on the part of the reporter for him to mention his desires to Laverne's husband. Because the unproven plane proves to be a high risk for Shumann, the possibility of someone assuming his role as the source of income becomes apparent. The reporter comments, "Maybe it's because I just want what I am

going to get, only I don't think it's just that. Yair, I'd just be the name, my name, you see: the house and the beds and what we would need to eat. . . Yes. I would be the name" (132-33).

This statement reflects Lacan's symbolic father as the reporter says he will assume the position of providing for the family. Currently, Shumann assumes this role since even he may not be the biological father; however, the reporter mentions that even he would not be a true father, or a male figure who loves, cares, and ultimately provides for a child to fulfill the child's physical and emotional needs. His admission that he would only "be the name" implies that his role would only be that of provision, and his relationship to the child would not be a true, normal father-child relationship. Susie Paul Johnson, author of "The Killer in *Pylon*," notes, "He wants to replace Shumann, the man whose name Laverne has taken as her own" (410). He would only assume the position, meaning the difference would only be his name instead of Shumann's. His intentions of providing for the family's financial needs present only a superficial relationship, neglecting the parent-child relationship that Shumann and Jack already neglect.

The reporter attempts to strengthen the relationship between him and Laverne, trying to make her like him by completing several tasks for other members of the group when he does not truly care for their needs. He continues the superficial relationship when he buys the boy ice cream just before Shumann's final flight, attempting to buy into Laverne's favor. He and the boy return to Laverne's side and witness the crash. The reporter is holding the boy during the crash that kills Shumann, representing his desire to be the next to assume the role of the symbolic father in Jack's life in order to be closer to Laverne. Laverne "snatched the little boy's hand and ran toward the sea-wall, the little boy dangling vainly on his short legs between here and the reporter who, holding the little boy's other hand, ran at his loose lightlyclattering gallop like a scarecrow in a gale" (170). This situation represents a pivotal part in the superficial relationship

since the boy symbolizes the connection between the reporter and Laverne, the way he met her and gained her attention. However, this soon ends as she “gave him a single pale cold terrible look, crying” and cursing him, “Get away from me!” (170). She blames the reporter for her husband’s death and refuses to acknowledge his presence anymore. Marta Paul Johnson, author of “‘I Have Decided Now:’ Laverne’s Transformation in *Pylon*,” remarks, “Furthermore, when Roger dies flying the plane, the reporter thinks not of Roger, not even of Laverne’s grief and now desperate situation. He thinks only of her reaction to him, of his reduced chances of having her” (292). His focus on her does not cease and becomes more apparent when he fails to address the impact of Shumann’s death; rather he worries about her disgust and disapproval of him. Susie Johnson reasons, “His motives for acquiring the plane, his knowledge of the plane and its problems, the persistence and skill with which he pursues the plan he devises, and finally his reaction to Roger’s death all suggest that he wants the flier dead” (407). Though his actions do not seem to warrant such an aggressive approach to what can be termed “skewed vision”—being distracted by one’s desires from the probable effects of one’s actions—which the reporter has, his commitment to helping Shuman find a plane does show his false relationship with Shumann since he acts in this way only to gain favor with Laverne. The reporter does not seem to care about the show, and he knows that Shumann’s performances in the contests are his means of earning money for the group; thus, the reporter helps Shumann locate a plane in order to indirectly provide for Laverne. As the reporter becomes more focused on Laverne, it becomes more apparent that the reporter’s lack of a stable father figure in his life directly relates to his inability to function as a father figure now, unable to avoid what he saw when he grew up—men who focus on the mother, not the child; therefore, he becomes distracted by the beauty of Laverne and does not fulfill the role of a surrogate father to the boy.

Despite the numerous adult males in his life, none of them proves to be the stable paternal figure that Jack needs. The child's confusion becomes apparent early in the novel as Jiggs taunts him by saying, "Who's your old man today, kid?" (29). Young Jack responds to Jiggs's comment: "Now the boy moved. With absolutely no change of expression he lowered his head and rushed at Jiggs, his fists flailing at the man" (29). For a young boy to become enraged by the question means that he not only understands that no one knows who his father is, he also does not know who truly retains the father figure role since both men share his mother. Neither Shumann nor the older Jack reveal that they know who is the father, which is another reason that neither one assumes full parental responsibility for the child. Young Jack Shumann shows attachment to any man who enters his life such as Jiggs and the reporter, which is typical of young kids; however, this acceptance of numerous "role models" eerily reflects the reporter's actions. Also, the influence of two men in his life leaves the boy with characteristics of both. Though multiple influences may not always be bad, the child's characteristics inherited by Shumann result in his departure. A news reporter concludes, "Before, they might not have known whose the kid was, but it was Shumann's name he went under. . . now that Shumann was gone, they would never get rid of him. . . and all the time they would be awake and moving there he will be, watching them right out of the mixedup name, Jack Shumann, that the kid has" (208). Since the child reminds Laverne and the older Jack of Roger Shumann, they decide to take him to Shumann's father. His name, Jack Shumann, symbolizes the lack of knowledge as to who is the father as well as the influences both have on him. Each one participates in the boy's life, but neither one will provide the proper attention that the boy needs instead of focusing on Laverne.

To make matters worse, the end of the novel proves to be an ultimate revelation of the lack of a sincere and true relationship between young Jack and his parents. Jack, the parachutist,

“had one competitor; now he will have to compete with every breath the kid draws and be cuckolded by every ghost that walks and refuses to give his name” (208). Because of this, Jack and Laverne decide to take the boy to Roger’s father’s house in Ohio. The boy becomes confused when he must leave Jack at the train station, wanting to stay with Jack but being denied this by Laverne. Jack gives him a hug and says good-bye, but no tears are shed (214-5). Dr. Shumann accepts the child but not without a thorough discussion with Laverne about her decision; however, even he remains apprehensive about taking in this child. He says, “We give him the home and care and affection which is his right both as a helpless child and as our grand—grand—and that in return for this, you are to make no attempt to see him or communicate with him as long as we live” (217). He cannot refer to him as his grandson because he still does not know if it is Roger’s child or not. He pleads, “If I just knew that he is Roger’s! If I just knew! Can’t you tell me? Can’t you give me some sign, some little sign?” (218). Dr. Shumann hesitates to welcome the child as his grandson and searches desperately for some way of knowing. Price contends that “the child’s predicament now parallel[s] the reporter’s own childhood—and Laverne’s” (xv). Even though the boy will be given a “home with care and affection,” the fulfillment of a father-figure may still be in doubt.

Another abandoned child in *Pylon* is Laverne. Jiggs explains to the reporter that “she was an orphan, see; her older sister that was married sent for her to come live with them when her folks died” (197). Laverne did not have any father figure in her life except for her sister’s devious husband, who “started teaching Laverne how to slip out and meet him and . . . he would tell her it was all right to twotime the sister that way, that it was all right for her to do the rest of it he wanted. Because he was the big guy, see, the one that paid for what she wore and what she

ate” (197). Laverne’s leading male figure in her life guided her in the wrong direction, influencing her to where she believed being with two men was not a significant problem.

The abuse that fills Laverne’s youth leads to continued abuse later in her life, a tragic flaw that she gains as a result of not having parental figures and being left with a morally perverted man. Marta Johnson states that Laverne’s promiscuity makes her susceptible to multiple forms of “abuse,” which is perceived by other characters as described through their statements (291). Marta Johnson argues that Laverne is the victim of the skewed views of other characters, depicting her in a bad light because of her relationship with two men; however, she is only in multiple relationships because she was a victim of her sister’s husband, sexually abused and led into a world of confusion regarding relationships. The sister’s husband believed he could share two women—one he was married to and the other he was not—which influenced Laverne to believe the same—it is ok to be married to one man and share a relationship with another. The lack of positive parental figures led her to be a horrible parent for her child, to leave him without tears and to plan to have another child afterwards.

The reporter, Jack, and Laverne are abandoned children, left vulnerable to the corrupt influences or the lack of any influence in their life. William Faulkner typically does not provide a flawed character without a flawed ancestor before him or her, leaving the blame to originate with a predecessor. Faulkner often felt the pressures of a flawed nature, a lack of inheritance as a result of his father’s inconsistency to hold a well-respected job such as an attorney at law, which his ancestors held before him, and the increased responsibility of caring for family members, something he often blamed his father for. Gwendolyn Chabrier, author of *Faulkner’s Families: A Southern Saga*, writes, “He inherited, for that matter, his father’s debts and his dependents, both white and black, without inheriting any money or property” (29). He also

inherited his father and grandfather's flaw of alcoholism, which plagued him through most of his life. Faulkner transposes his blame from reality to fiction when he allows other characters to carry the blame of corruption and destinies of failure on fictional ancestors. The decaying ancestral line regarding character is something Faulkner experienced and wrote about.

The absence of father figures is one of the key themes in *Pylon*. The abandonment of the characters in this novel by their parents leads to the unavoidable vulnerability that ultimately leads to turmoil, fate as destined by the choices of their parents. Faulkner does not passively insert this idea into *Pylon* since he presents three separate cases in the reporter, Laverne, and Jack. The reporter did not have a father figure in his youth, Laverne had a paternal figure that led her in the wrong direction, and Jack had multiple father figures who did not fully accept the role for his benefit but did so for their own. The idea of absent father figures remains the heavily repeated theme in *Pylon*; however, other works of William Faulkner depict the effects of one or many dysfunctional father figures.

Chapter 3

Anse Bundren: The Dead Parent in *As I Lay Dying*

The narrator leads the audience to believe that Anse Bundren's journey to Jefferson in an effort to fulfill Addie's request to bury her with the rest of her family is a heartwarming gesture that presents a small spark of hope amidst a corrupt and hard-pressed South; however, Anse's character is the exact opposite of this positive perception. He uses his family, including his children, to fulfill his own needs, which he masks with his wife's request for burial in Jefferson. He takes money from his daughter and Jewel's horse from him, and he endangers Cash's health by letting Darl pour concrete over his broken leg to keep it in place. Besides being a selfish thief, Anse no longer works because he supposedly has a condition in which his body cannot produce sweat; Anse does not work or help others for fear of dying. He assumes a position of authority by instructing others on what they should do, yet he cannot fulfill this traditionally patriarchal role, relying on his wife's words, her request, to force his family to move forward with the journey. Stealing from his family, being unemployed, and having an inability to establish authority as a father hardly suggest that Anse is anything more than dysfunctional. His ineffective and unethical role as a father and the harmful effects his decisions and actions have on his children make him a significant character of focus in analyzing William Faulkner's recurring dysfunctional father figures.

Anse's selfish nature begins early in his life as he stops working on account of his supposed medical condition, which no physician diagnosed. Darl explains, "I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it" (Faulkner 1700). These few sentences present several areas that point to Anse's dysfunctional

character. One point is that this condition is based on Anse's words, which later will be determined to be false on several occasions. Anse tells people that he suffers from this condition, but no other character in the story can support this claim. Also, the incident that causes his condition occurs when he is twenty-two years old; Darl, the second oldest child in the family, never recalls his father sweating. This suggests that Anse stopped working shortly after his first son, Cash, or possibly his second son, Darl, was born. Rita Rippetoe, author of "Unstained Shirt, Stained Character: Anse Bundren Reread" argues that Anse could have the condition known as "anhidrosis, the body's inability to produce sweat," or his condition could be a result of a "heat stroke." During the early 1900s when medical care was not developed enough to treat a heat-stroke, a person suffering from one would suffer from other medical problems such as further damage to the sweat glands of the skin when exposed to heat (318-9). Rippetoe also makes an assumption in reference to Darl's saying, "I suppose he believes it," which suggests that the condition is either fictional or not serious according to Darl. Rippetoe disputes that Darl could not know whether Anse's inability to sweat is fact or fiction because he displays a unique ability to see certain incidents in the novel without being present (Rippetoe 315). Though both of Rippetoe's arguments are logical, she ignores a significant role that Darl plays in the story, and the impact his insight would have on the truth to Anse's condition. Darl's ability to describe events in the story without being present is unique, and throughout the story his descriptions are identical to what actually happens, giving him a prophetic presence in the novel. For example, Darl and Jewel are not at home when Addie dies, but Darl is the narrator who describes in detail what happens: "[Addie] lies back and turns her head without so much as glancing at pa. She looks at Vardaman; her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flames glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone had leaned

down and blown upon them” (1711). This vivid description of Addie’s last moments could not merely be communicated from one person to another; it is as though Darl is there when he actually is not. Darl’s statement about his father’s condition is not misleading because his accounts of other events of the story are true; thus, it would be a bold and unsubstantiated claim to say that this one comment by Darl remains the one incorrect statement on his part. Revisiting Anse’s condition, Rippetoe contends that “the chronic invalidism resulting from the after-effects of heat-stroke, a possible temporarily incapacitating back injury, years without teeth, feet deformed by childhood poverty: these clearly mark him as a ‘misfortunate’ man whose misfortune explains his deficiencies of character” (325). Though Rippetoe’s description of Anse’s problems is correct, she misinterprets the heat-stroke; Anse’s deficiencies of character, his selfish nature of lying and stealing and his absence as a functional father explain his medical condition, the inability to sweat on account of a heat-stroke, because he creates it to avoid work. While Anse exaggerates his health problems, he does not seem to show enough concern for his family members’ health.

Prior to Addie’s death, Anse significantly downplays Addie’s illness. Anse tells Addie, “I knowed you are not sick. You’re just tired. You lay down and rest” (1707). After Dr. Peabody arrives, Anse asserts, “I never sent for you. . . . I take you to witness I never sent for you” (1707). Anse knows that his wife does not feel well, yet he chooses to perceive Addie’s state as being tired, not ill. The reason he does not wish to send for the doctor is that he does not want to spend money; he is saving money to buy a new set of teeth. He bemoans, “And now I got to pay for it, me without a tooth in my head, hoping to get ahead enough so I could get my mouth fixed where I could eat God’s own victuals as a man should. . .” (1707). While his wife is near death, Anse complains about having to spend money on the doctor’s visit. He mentions his

desire for the teeth two more times after his wife's death. After making a vain attempt to straighten the sheets over Addie's lifeless body, Anse states, "God's will be done. . . . Now I can get them teeth" (1713). The second time he mentions that the teeth will ease his pain that he has suffered as a misfortunate man (1732). Anse reiterates his desire for new teeth prior to and after Addie's death, suggesting that his desire to travel to Jefferson is not solely for Addie as he often states, but it is for his teeth.

Anse consistently uses Addie's request to be buried in Jefferson as an excuse for the challenging trek; however, the true reason for traveling is to fulfill his selfish desires. Throughout the story, Anse repeatedly says, "I give her my promise. . . . Her mind was set on it" (1733). He continues to provide this excuse for the trip to Jefferson despite the nauseating smell emanating from the dead corpse in the coffin and the complaints about it from the people along the way, asking him to bury his wife now instead of traveling any further. His dedication to fulfilling her request portrays him as a faithful husband while carrying the foul-smelling corpse around the countryside makes him a fool; however, while both of these interpretations seem logical, his true purpose is his desire to find a new wife and new teeth in Jefferson, revealing his selfish nature. Before the Bundrens cross the river, Uncle Billy comments, "It's like a man that's let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows" (1726). This can easily be seen to refer to taking the trip to bury Addie; however, the true meaning in what Uncle Billy says reveals that Anse, the selfish natured man, will take the trip to Jefferson for selfish desires no matter what may hinder his progress and at any cost to the people around him.

After Addie's death, Anse changes his appearance and demeanor, revealing another desire to travel to Jefferson, which is for a new wife. Before the funeral, Anse changes his

usually shabby appearance. Tull observes, “Anse meets us at the door. He has shaved, but not good. There is a long cut on his jaw, and he is wearing Sunday pants and a white shirt with the neckband buttoned. . . . He looks folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed, shaking us by the hand as we walk up onto the porch and scrape our shoes. . .” (1724). The cut on his face shows that he does not shave too often while looking into the eyes of others implies a change in his behavior. This seemingly new appearance is not the first time Anse presents himself in such a way; when Addie describes meeting Anse, he is a successful and hard-working man who owns a home, which is something women often look for when searching for a husband. Addie recalls, “. . . I looked up that day and saw Anse standing there in his Sunday clothes. . . ‘But you’ve got a house. They tell me you’ve got a house and a good farm’” (1756). Anse wears Sunday clothes when he asks Addie to be his wife, which ironically he wears the day she dies and the day he returns with the future Mrs. Bundren. Vardaman points out another difference in Anse after Addie’s death: “Pa shaves everyday now because my mother is a fish” (1730). The fish reference acknowledges that Anse starts shaving after Addie dies. Later, Anse, searching for spades to dig the grave, stops at a house to ask to borrow one; Cash asks if he or Jewel should retrieve the spades, but Anse tells him, “‘I reckon I better.’ He got down and went up the pat and around the house to the back. The music stopped, then it started again” (1781). This is the first instance of Anse at work instead of his sons, notably because he wants a new wife. Again, Anse uses the excuse of burying Addie, asking to borrow the spades to dig her grave, when his real intention is to meet a new wife. Ironically, Anse’s action here is to attract the woman’s attention just as his action of approaching Addie and telling her that he owned land, which he farmed and worked before, convinced Addie to accept his offer to be his wife. Now, he is on the verge of

beginning a new cycle of deceit with another woman while showing little reverence to the stated purpose of the journey.

Anse claims that many of his children's actions disrespect their mother, who is the reason they travel to Jefferson; however, Anse is the person who disrespects her the most. On several occasions, Anse declares, "It ain't respectful. . . . It's a deliberate flouting of her and of me. . . . It's a flouting of the dead" (1730). Though Cash's planning to fix the Tull's barn roof, Dewey Dell's carrying pies to sell in town, and Jewel's riding the horse instead of on the wagon may be disrespecting the sincerity and the purpose of the trip, Anse does not take the trip for respect of Addie either.

Anse abuses Addie's request in order to swindle his children. Even after Cash severely breaks his leg, Anse refuses to leave him at Armstid's house; Anse claims that Addie would want the entire family to bury her, but he really does not want to leave anyone since he is unable to work. Without the family, he would not be able to cross the flooded river, purchase a second team to pull the wagon, or dig the hole and bury Addie in Jefferson, which are all jobs that his children complete. Again, Anse exploits Addie's death to coerce Dewey Dell into believing her actions are wrong instead of his own. He tries to take her money, and she calls him a "thief," to which he replies, "I give you love and care, yet my own daughter, the daughter of my dead wife, calls me a thief over her mother's grave" (1788). He attempts to make Dewey Dell feel guilty for her statements instead of her perceiving his actions as wrong. Anse hides his obviously unethical behavior of taking Dewey Dell's money when he says, "It's just a loan. God knows. I hate for my blooden children to reproach me. But I give them what was mine without stint. Cheerful I give them without stint. And now they deny me" (1789). Anse tells Dewey Dell that he will repay her later; however, he cannot pay her back since he does not do any work on

account of his medical condition. If he ever does pay her back, it would be with the money that his children earn for him; this transaction would still be considered stealing since the money is the children's to begin with. Despite her accusations and his defense, Anse still takes the money from his daughter and purchases his teeth with it later. He also implies that he willingly gives to his children, yet nowhere in the entire novel does he give anything to his children; all of the transactions are his taking from them.

Exploiting Addie's wishes so as to deceive his children, Anse steals from them to fund his purchase of teeth. The first example of this is when he sells Jewel's horse in exchange for mules to pull the wagon. When Jewel confronts him about selling the horse, Anse defends, "I thought that if I could do without eating, my sons could do without riding. God knows I did" (1764). Anse will not allow for Jewel to have anything other than bare necessities since he cannot afford his own desirables. Earlier, after Jewel purchased the horse, Anse complains, "So you bought a horse. . . . You went behind my back and bought a horse. You never consulted me; you know how tight it is for us to make by, yet you bought a horse for me to feed. Taken the work from your flesh and blood and bought a horse with it" (1742). Anse makes two different but connected points. He notes that Jewel has extra money that he did not inform Anse about; yet, if he had informed Anse about the money, the same situation of Anse taking the money would probably happen as it does to Dewey Dell later in the novel. The second point he makes is that Jewel has "taken the work from your flesh and blood," meaning that Jewel worked for his own benefit instead of doing work for Anse to make money for Anse.

Anse continues to exhibit selfish behavior through relatively minor participation in certain situations or lack thereof throughout the novel. While Cash feverishly makes Addie's coffin in the rain, Anse goes inside to find raincoats. Instead of getting one for Cash, Anse uses

one to cover the lantern and one for himself though he is not doing any work. Anse remarks, “I don’t know what you’ll do. . . . Darl taken his coat with him” (1722). Cash continues working in the rain while Anse watches and remains dry. On two separate occasions, the coffin with Addie in it is at risk of being destroyed, once by fire and once by water. Both times Anse stands aside and watches as his sons struggle to save Addie’s body. When the river waters overturn the wagon and Cash, Darl, and Jewel struggle to retrieve the coffin, Cash’s tools, and themselves, Anse stands on the embankment never offering to help nor instructing them as to what to do (1748). During the barn fire, Anse stands aside as Jewel single-handedly maneuvers the coffin away from the burning barn, risking his life for his mother again since he had already saved her when trying to cross the river (1775). The family travels to Jefferson to bury Addie, yet Anse’s actions during these near tragic events reveal that he in fact is not focused on Addie; his main purpose for going to Jefferson is for himself. Even Dr. Peabody points out Anse’s selfish nature after Cash says, “It never bothered me much,” and he responds, ““You mean, it never bothered Anse much”” (1782). While Anse’s selfish nature permeates the story, it extends to his children as well through his paternal influence.

As he consistently reveals a dysfunctional father with children who are flawed by the father’s influence in his novels, Faulkner exhibits character flaws in the Bundren children. Though the children inherit flaws from Anse, they do hold a strong connection to their mother that allows them to resist the completely flawed character Anse holds. The oldest son, Cash, works on the coffin in the beginning of the novel, working to create a coffin worthy enough to hold his mother. He works on the coffin meticulously, displaying a hard work ethic Anse does not have. While this characteristic does not resemble Anse in any way, Cash’s obsession with his tools reveals a selfish nature that echoes Anse’s. When the family leaves the house for Jefferson,

Cash “is carrying his tool box,” and he tells Anse, “I’ll stop at Tull’s on the way back. . . . Get on that barn roof” (1730). Just like Anse, Cash plans to go to Jefferson to bury his mother, but his intentions are to work to make money as well. Marc Hewson, author of “‘My Children Were of Me Alone’: Maternal Influence in Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*,” concurs that Cash strongly reflects Anse’s character through his actions:

While he understands the need for action, he clings at first to a certain rigidity.

Much as Anse does, he seems unfazed by the succession of events leading up to and following Addie’s death. He sits outside her window planing her coffin in the same slow plodding with which Anse awaits her death, the inevitability of circumstance and the weary progression of time affecting him no more than they do his father. Even the acceptance of the cement cast for his broken leg during the journey seems indicative of the inaction of the Bundren heart. (564)

The Bundren heart is a direct reference to Anse’s existence as a selfish and lazy man, caring for himself while doing nothing. Though his children do not have identical resemblances to Anse, they do have distinct traits that reveal the strong influence of their father. Cash may have a strong work ethic, but his and Dewey Dell’s nature reflects many of Anse’s characteristics.

Dewey Dell’s intentions do not always reflect her statements, which resembles the deceitful nature of her father. Dewey Dell “has [a] package in her hand” as she walks to the wagon, and she relays to Anse that it is “‘Mrs. Tull’s cakes. . . . I’m taking them to town for her’” (1730). Dewey Dell’s words mean one thing, but her actions are quite different. The package contains a dress instead of the cakes, meaning she lies to her father. Also, she plans to travel to Jefferson to have an abortion; like Anse and Cash, her reasons for traveling do not match what she says they are, going for Addie. Dewey Dell’s dishonest character reflects Anse.

Both Anse and his daughter make statements to hide their true thoughts or plans of action, attempting to hide their flaws from others. However, she is the one who cares for Addie during her illness and cooks for the family, inheriting the responsibilities of a mother and fulfilling them. Anse influences her, but her character is not completely flawed by him. While Dewey Dell fulfills these responsibilities, Anse miserably fails to do the same with the responsibilities of the father. Dewey Dell and Cash mirror Anse's character in some ways, yet Darl, Vardaman, and Jewel do not.

The relationship between Anse and his two sons, Darl and Vardaman, is disconnected and absent, influencing the two boys' behaviors in the novel. Darl, the oddly prophetic narrator, struggles to gain the love of his mother that Jewel receives from her. The main reason for Addie's rejection of Darl is on account of Anse's deceit as Addie reveals, "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that 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" (1757). Anse's actions cause Addie to despise Darl; thus, Darl cannot change or resist his father's influence on the relationship Darl has with his mother. Darl admits, "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother" (1728). Darl understands that his mother does not accept him, and he interprets it as though he does not have a mother. When Darl must travel with the rest of the family to bury Addie, he begins acting in an odd manner. Anse points out that "we hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl begun to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat with Cash, with his dead ma laying in her coffin at his feet, laughing. How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him, . . . it's a reflection on your ma, I says, not me" (1731). Anse remains the absent father figure for Darl as he does for the other children; therefore, Darl is left parentless, which could be connected to his

developing insanity while on the trip. Once Addie dies and ultimately is buried in her grave, any hope of Darl gaining her favor does not exist, causing Darl to lose his mind. Eventually, Darl's seemingly uncontrollable laughter and repetitions of "yes" cause Anse to send him to the asylum in Jackson, forever tormented by the rejection of his mother on account of his father's dishonesty with her.

Vardaman may be too young to exhibit strong characteristics of Anse, but Anse does influence him some in the novel. The only interaction between Vardaman and Anse in the novel is when Vardaman presents a large fish he caught in the river to Anse. Anse instructs Vardaman to fillet his catch. When Vardaman returns, the fish has been butchered and Vardaman is a mess (1705-8). Anse's lack of desire to work already influences Vardaman, forcing him to fillet a fish, which he does not know how to do. Anse comments, "Well, I reckon I aint no call to expect no more of him than of his man-growed brothers" (1708). This pessimistic statement resembles the pessimism Faulkner's father often displayed when talking about Faulkner's writing career. Obviously, Anse treats Vardaman in the same manner he does the other children, which already causes Vardaman to act in a dysfunctional manner on account of a lack of parenting.

Jewel's character does not reflect Anse's because he is the result of an extra-marital affair between Addie and Whitfield. Addie makes it clear that Jewel is not Anse's son when she admits, "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" (1758). Faulkner makes the difference of character between Anse and Jewel obvious, widening the gap between the two. While Anse and the other family members and friends steadfastly wait for Addie's inevitable death, Jewel expresses his anger and disgust because of their actions. Jewel protests, "It's because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that

goddamn box. Where she's got to see him. Where every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing. . . I told him to go somewhere else. . . . And now them others sitting there like buzzards. Waiting, fanning themselves" (1699). Jewel displays an obvious affection for his mother while Anse does not. In order to buy the horse, Jewel works in Quick's field each night to earn enough money, much to Anse's dismay since Anse feels that Jewel should be working for him, yet Jewel does not since he is exhausted from working in the night. Anse does no work while Jewel works more than anyone else. Jewel refuses to slow down while carrying Addie's coffin to the wagon, showing a resistance to his father's lack of action: "'Steady it a minute, now' [Anse] says, letting go. He turns back to lock the door, but Jewel will not wait. 'Come on,' [Jewel] says in that suffocating voice. 'Come on'" (1729). Eventually, Jewel carries the coffin alone as Darl barely holds on, and Cash is left behind just like Anse. Since Jewel does not tell anyone about his second job, Cash and Darl make assumptions as to his whereabouts each night; these assumptions make a connection between Jewel and Whitfield. Cash speculates, "'Taint any girl. . . . It's a married woman somewhere. Aint any young girl got that much daring and staying power'" (1740). Cash and Darl think Jewel is having a relationship with a married woman, almost replicating the situation that produced him. Though Jewel does not have an affair, the speculations that he does reveal the link between him and Whitfield, yet he still cannot avoid the decisions that impact him made by Anse.

Anse's role as a dysfunctional father figure still haunts Jewel though he is not Anse's child. Jewel purchases a horse by working throughout the night on numerous occasions, yet by the end of the story he no longer has a horse. Anse makes the decision to trade the horse for a team of mules without Jewel's permission. Jewel's only response is frustration because he is trapped. Hewson agrees, "It is between precisely these emotions that Jewel vacillates for most of

the novel, furious at the circumstances in which he finds himself, despairing of any escape.

Much of the same might be said of Addie, angry at her father's philosophy of encroaching death and, before discovering motherhood, hopeless of finding a method of nullifying it" (560).

Though Jewel despises Anse and does not abide by Anse's rules, he cannot refuse to sell the horse as it is funding the trip to Jefferson for Addie. While the other family members journey to Jefferson for themselves, Jewel actually makes the trip for his mother. Hewson acknowledges this affection Jewel has for Addie as a "testament of his love for her" (560). Though Jewel often rebels against Anse as his mother does in the novel, he is still trapped by not knowing his biological father; thus, Anse is left to assume but not fulfill the role of father for Jewel.

While the other characters in the novel have several narrations, Addie has only one, yet it exhibits her understanding of the patriarchal role and reveals a truth about her father and Anse's words. Addie's father provides the first taste of a dysfunctional father when he tells her "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead for a long time" (1755). Her father's pessimistic words strongly mirror the cynic personality of Jason Compson, Sr., another dysfunctional father figure who resembles Faulkner's father, in *The Sound and the Fury*. Hewson contends "[m]ore than just being a refutation of activity and living, the patriarchal philosophy questions even the possibility of meaningful existence. . . . It is of course Anse who is the most obvious example of this theory in practice" (554). Hewson reasons that patriarchal philosophy in *As I Lay Dying* is the reversal of the belief that life is a "movement from womb to grave, an active development which devolves into stasis only at death" (554). Addie's father embraces the idea of death while Anse remains inactive throughout the novel, revealing the patriarchal philosophy of maintaining a static lifestyle instead of an active one. Since fathers have such a powerful influence on their children even when they are not much of a father to begin with, Addie keeps her father's cynical

advice with her when she is an adult; however, she soon realizes that this advice haunts her instead of helps her. She later expresses, “When I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good, that words don’t ever fit even what they are trying to say at” (1756). Addie’s motherhood gives her a defense against just “living to stay dead” as her father once told her, and this also partly explains her disgust for seemingly useless Anse throughout the novel. Hewson grants, “[i]t is only with motherhood, though, that Addie discovers the lie which, both father and Anse tell her” (555). Cash’s birth causes Addie to realize that certain words are created to describe something when the people who experience specific situations do not need a word for description; it is at this point that Addie realizes her father’s advice about awaiting death is not true since motherhood provides her with a reason for living. Addie acknowledges, “When [Cash] was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn’t care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride” (1756). The idea of people creating and using words but not knowing or experiencing what these words are trying to describe is an important theme that reveals Anse’s dysfunctional nature. As previously mentioned, Anse often uses the excuse that the trip is for Addie; however, if he uses these words but does not necessarily mean them, then his true reasons for the trip are not what he is actually saying.

Though Hewson debates that Addie is the sole driving force behind the journey, John Lowe contends that Addie is the source for the trip, but the sons make the decisions while Anse stands by passively. Lowe, author of “The Fraternal Fury of the Falkners and the Bundrens,” holds that “[t]heir journey to [Addie’s] burial site in Jefferson is ostensibly led by their father,

Anse; however, like Murry Falkner, he has no final authority in the family; it is the sons who must decide the issue, and the sons who either want or had the true affections of the mother, who scorned her mate” (603-4). Lowe’s statement may be true to the extent that Anse holds no power, similar to Murry, and the sons have affection for their mother; nevertheless, they do not make decisions to go on the trip solely for the reason of respecting their mother except for Jewel. Jewel does not have to go but chooses to do so to respect his mother. Cash goes but obviously has another carpentry job on his mind as well, showing that his mother is not the only reason for his trip. Both Lowe and Henson concur that Anse holds no authority in the family and is a significantly ineffective father figure, yet Lowe insists that the story revolves around the struggle between the brothers for the love and affection of their mother. Lowe seems to avoid the fact that Addie dies within the first half of the novel; thus, the rivalry for affection should end with her. No noticeable change in the behavior of the sons exists at the time of Addie’s death or after, so even though the theory may connect, it does not retain the significant evidence to prove it. Addie remains the primary force that compels the family to go to Jefferson, and Anse remains the figure with no control.

Addie attacks the meaning of Anse’s words as well as his function as a husband and father, presenting him as an empty and meaningless figure. After Addie explains her beliefs about why people make the words such as motherhood and fear, she discusses Anse’s use of the word “love”:

He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn’t need a word for that anymore than for pride or fear. Cash did not need to say it to me or I to him, and I would say, Let

Anse use it, if he wants to. So that it was Anse or love; love or Anse: it didn't matter. (1756)

Addie makes a connection between the word “love” and Anse, which are both meaningless to her. She refers to love as a shape to fill a lack, which is how she feels about Anse: he is a husband only to fill the lack, but he does not fulfill the responsibilities of one nor of a father; he retains the title of both, but not the actions of either. She declares, “I did not even ask him for what he could have given me: not-Anse. That was my duty to him, to not ask that, and that duty I fulfilled. I would be I; I would let him be the shape and echo of his word. That was more than he asked, because he could not have asked for that and been Anse, using himself so with a word” (1757). When she refers to him as “not-Anse,” she marks his character as a void in the family. She says that “I would be I”, meaning her existence depends on her action; thus, Anse attempts to exist through his words, yet he does not because he is often inactive. Addie concludes, “And then he died. He did not know he was dead. I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in peoples' lacks” (1757). She notes that Anse died through his words and his inaction. Anse often makes many statements throughout the story, but he does not live by them; though he hides the reason he travels to Jefferson from other characters, Anse Bundren is unable to hide his true lack of character to Addie.

The Bundren children ignore Anse's comments, exemplifying the emptiness of Anse's words that Addie describes. After Addie dies, Cash enters the room where Anse and Dewey Dell are standing. Anse states, “She take and left us. . . . How nigh are you done? . . . You'll have to do the best you can, with them boys gone off that-a-way” while Cash does not reply in any

manner and “is not listening to pa at all” (1712). Anse then tells Dewey Dell, “I reckon you better get supper on,” and she does not speak or make any motion (1712). The children focus on the passing of their mother while Anse continues to discuss the preparations for the trip, showing no emotion for his dead wife. Anse’s instructions carry no meaning just as Addie says before when she discusses his words. As stated earlier, Jewel ignores Anse when he asks him to slow down for him to lock the door, but Jewel does not listen and keeps going. Hewson reasons, “As the children of Addie Bundren they are partly immune to the patriarchal linguistic machine because they will inherit her disbelief in it” (556-7). The children resist her father’s cynical view of living and Anse’s choice of a static lifestyle—Cash builds a coffin, Darl and Jewel work in the field, Dewey Dell cooks, and even Vardaman catches and attempts to butcher a fish. They may exhibit a selfish nature like their father’s, but each displays an active role as contributing members to the family that gives them meaning unlike Anse. Each of Anse’s commands and instructions has little effect on his children because he only holds the title of father, but he does not live it.

Anse’s lack of authority and strained relationship with Addie is a strong connection to Faulkner’s father and his relationship with his wife. David Minter affirms that Anse and Murry have similar characteristics, relating Murry’s compliant nature, especially when the family sold the railroad, to Anse’s inaction. He also mentions that Maud, often indifferent towards Murry, informed William when she was dying that “she hoped she went to heaven where she wouldn’t have to talk to her husband” (Lowe 611). Anse does not complain about the situations he faces; rather he continues with the journey. Also, Addie does not call for Anse when she is near death; she asks for Cash to come to the room even though Anse is her husband. She makes no comment to Anse before she dies. Like Anse, Murry held little authority in Faulkner’s life as William

often ignored his father's demands, facing Murry's punishment without worry. Faulkner favored his mother, who supported his artistic abilities, while Murry negatively criticized William's career. The emptiness of the relationships between Anse and his wife and children reflect the unaffectionate attitude Murry had with his family.

William Faulkner presents a powerful image of a dysfunctional father amidst the symbolism of the South in *As I Lay Dying*. Post Civil War, the South could be described as tumultuous and broken, which the Bundren family represents. Faulkner utilizes the dysfunctional father figure as a direct representation of the lost hope and pride many fathers experienced as a result of a lack of work in the South after the war. While Faulkner's main ideas are to write about the South, the similarities of Anse and Murry and its importance in representing Faulkner's ideas is unavoidable. Anse Bundren is the biological father, yet he cannot hold the affectionate and authoritative relationship that most people feel a typical father would with his children; as a result, the children are inevitably flawed and inherit a fate predestined by their father's actions. This reveals undeniable characteristics that connect him with Murry Falkner. Though Addie dies in the novel, her power that moves the family still remains as the family journeys to Jefferson because of her; on the other hand, Anse may be alive, but his role and power as a parent has been dead long before Addie even become ill. Anse Bundren is the void in *As I Lay Dying* and is a noteworthy dysfunctional father figure created by William Faulkner.

Chapter 4

An Unbreakable Circle: Characters Bound by the Influence of Father Figures in *Light in August*

The inescapable fate that the characters of *Light in August* face as a result of the influence of their ancestors remains one of the most important themes of the book. As either absent or dysfunctional father figures in *Pylon*, *The Sound and The Fury*, and *As I Lay Dying* provide their children with a fated, flawed life, the paternal figures in *Light in August* do the same. While Faulkner presents one main family with an absent or dysfunctional father figure in *Pylon* and *As I Lay Dying*, he reveals a similar theme in *Light in August* through eight characters: Byron Bunch attempts to fill the void left by the absent father Lucas Burch, Mr. McEarchern struggles to assume a paternal role for Joe Christmas since Doc Hines kills Joe's father and severs any connection to Hines himself, Joanna Burden resumes the work her father carried on before her as a supporter of African Americans despite the negative view the townspeople have of her, Percy Grimm's father retains a lasting, cold effect on Percy, and the Reverend Hightower is plagued by the memory of his relationship with his father. Though some of the characters may not be biological fathers, the role they do or do not fulfill in the story resembles the generally accepted role of a father to certain characters. The past that haunts each of the characters is not linked; nevertheless, at the end of the story the fated children connect through the death of one life, Joe Christmas, and the beginning of another, Lena Grove's child. William Faulkner presents a group of characters destined to live in the shadows of their fathers' actions and unites them at the end of the story to exhibit the power of influence a father has on his descendants.

The central character that appears in the majority of the book, Joe Christmas, struggles with his identity and his role in society because of the absence of his biological father and the rejection from his grandfather. Doc Hines's daughter becomes pregnant with Joe as a result of

her relationship with a young man from the circus. Because the act of miscegenation highly upsets Doc Hines, he becomes furious because he claims the young man from the circus is black instead of Mexican, which is what Doc Hines's daughter believes the man to be. Unable to control his anger and believing himself to be an instrument of God, Doc Hines kills Joe's father, lets his own daughter die during childbirth, and then takes the baby to an orphanage to be adopted. Hines not only eliminates Joe's biological father, he removes all blood relatives from Joe's life when he takes Joe away as an infant; this act twice removes father figures from Joe's life as the biological father and the maternal grandfather become absent. Doc Hines continues to ensure that the "abomination" is not associated with him as he works at the orphanage in Memphis until Joe is adopted. Doc Hines later depicts God's will for him when he retells what God instructed him to do: "I have put the mark on him and now I am going to put the knowledge. And I have set you there to watch and guard My will. It will be yours to tend to it and oversee" (371). Hines believes the mark is Joe's father's racial bloodline, and this is what Hines attempts to ensure that everyone knows about Joe, guaranteeing a lower social status in his grandfather's eyes. In an attempt to save the honor of his family name, Hines in turn destroys it as he murders his daughter and her lover, and he sacrifices his own grandson. Hines's actions reveal a desire to save the honor and respect of the Old South, yet his actions do the exact opposite, showing the inevitable and unavoidable collapse of the South and the aristocratic family at the hands of a dysfunctional father. Though Hines makes sure everyone knows Joe's heritage, it is Joe's father that is accredited with that inescapable circle.

Joe Christmas's partial black heritage plagues him throughout the story as he fluctuates between the social status of a white man and a black man. Joe does not fully establish himself as white or black in the story, showing a struggle with his identity as inherited from his white

mother and black father. Joe retains a job working at a mill for a short period of time and garners a modest amount of wealth from illegally selling whiskey to other men in the area. He owns an expensive car that Lucas Burch, a white man, drives for him. This establishes Joe with the social status of a white man, yet he lives in a slave cabin on Joanna Burden's property. Since Joanna is an opponent of slavery and supports black rights, the shelter and support from Joanna portrays Joe as a black man. After Joe murders Joanna Burden, the woman he had a relationship with, he leaves town. As the townspeople search for him, he trades his clothes for a black man's shoes, representing his acceptance of his black heritage. The narrator notes, "[Joe] thinks quietly, sitting on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of Negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves" (339). While traveling away from Jefferson, Joe begins to realize and embrace his black heritage more. He retains more of a white social status while in Jefferson, the town that knew little about him, yet when he was a child living outside of town and now leaving Jefferson as an adult, his identity as a black man strengthens. Ultimately, his black bloodline leads to his demise as this curse, according to Doc Hines, guides him to circle back to Doc Hines and his wife.

Though Joe Christmas may have escaped the wrath of Doc Hines when he was a child, he returns to Mottstown where Doc Hines attempts to ensure that God's curse on Joe is fulfilled. Hines and his wife move to Mottstown after Mr. McEarchern adopts Joe Christmas from the orphanage. Thirty years later, Joe Christmas arrives in Mottstown as a fugitive. Upon entering town, Joe thinks, "And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years. . . . But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo" (339). Notably, Joe did not live in Mottstown when he was a

child, yet he comments that he cannot escape “that circle,” and before Joe thinks to himself, the narrator comments, “Looking, [Joe] can see the smoke low on the sky, beyond an imperceptible corner; he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years” (339). The street Joe is reentering is that one which was paved for him by Doc Hines; the curse, his black heritage, which Doc Hines proclaimed that God put on him at his birth remains with Joe for thirty years whether he acknowledged it or not. John T. Irwin, author of *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*, concurs with the idea of the cycle, yet he believes it begins and ends with Hines:

Joe Christmas’s life is, of course, set in its path when his maternal grandfather Doc Hines, who has murdered Joe’s father, leaves Joe on the steps of the orphanage and then takes a job at the orphanage to watch the child and make sure that God’s curse on Joe, who is a product of miscegenation, is carried out. . . . It is Hines who seals Joe’s fate at the end of the novel by inciting the townspeople to lynch his grandson. (62)

The cycle is the force that constrains the descendant of a dysfunctional father figure, Hines does end the cycle, but it is Joe’s race inherited from his father that technically begins the unavoidable cycle. Doc Hines’s proclamation of Joe’s status as a black man and Hines’s dedication to ensuring that God’s curse on Joe be fulfilled follows Joe throughout his life; Doc Hines, the only blood-related paternal figure for Joe Christmas, announces Joe’s curse at the beginning and the end of Joe’s life.

While Doc Hines and Joe’s biological father play important influential roles as absent father figures in Joe’s life since Christmas does not know who either is, Mr. McEachern provides a third influential role in Joe’s life but as a surrogate father. Doc Hines remains at the orphanage as a janitor until Mr. McEachern adopts Joe, symbolizing a transition of paternal influences in

Joe's life. Mr. McEachern provides a stern paternal figure in Joe's life. Mr. McEachern remains the dominant figure in the house as Mrs. McEachern fails to stand up to his abusive actions toward Joe. Mr. McEachern attempts to instill the commitment for learning and reciting passages from the Bible that he has into Joe; however, Joe refuses to succumb to Mr. McEachern's demands. Joe exhibits this rebellious nature at the point of adoption after Mr. McEachern acknowledges that Joe will "eat [Mr. McEachern's] bread and he will observe [Mr. McEachern's] religion" (145). The narrator describes Joe's thoughts: "The child was not listening. He was not bothered. He did not especially care, anymore than if the man had said the day was hot when it was not hot. He didn't even bother to say to himself *My name ain't McEachern. My name is Christmas* There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time" (145). Joe's rebellious nature through a passive attitude resembles the same opposition Faulkner showed his father Murry. Faulkner did not avoid confrontation with Murry such as when William's friends ran from an angry Murry on the golf course while William remained confident and steadfast, intentionally hitting a golf ball in Murry's direction. Mr. McEachern's voice is described as "not unkind. It was not human, personal, at all. It was just cold, implacable, like written or printed words" (149). Again, similarities between Murry and McEachern are apparent as Faulkner's brother noted that Murry often displayed an impersonal nature with his sons (Blotner 18). In an effort to help Joe listen to his instructions, Mr. McEachern prays with Joe, asking God "that the child's stubborn heart be softened and that the sin of disobedience be forgiven him also" (152). After the prayer, the narrator points out that "[Joe] did not move at all. But his eyes were open (his face had never been hidden or even lowered) and his face was quite calm; calm, peaceful, quite inscrutable" (153). Mr. McEachern then instructs Joe to pick up the Bible again in order for Joe to learn the verses. Mr. McEachern

repeatedly tries to force his religion on Joe, punishing him by whipping him and even punching him on one occasion, while Joe consistently rejects it. Mr. McEachern eventually tells Joe that his consistent disobedience has led him to committing numerous sins: “You have revealed every other sin of which you are capable: sloth, and ingratitude, and irreverence and blasphemy. And now I have taken you in the remaining two: lying and lechery” (164). McEachern hits Joe and leaves him stunned. The strict nature of McEachern and the steady resistance of Joe strain their relationship and inevitably lead to Joe’s reaction against McEachern.

Mr. McEachern continues to inform Joe of his mischievous and sinful actions, forcing Joe to retaliate against him and make an attempt to break free from McEachern. Joe meets a waitress at a local restaurant and begins to meet her in private and going to dances with her. On one occasion, McEachern discovers Joe sneaking away to meet Bobbie at night. Outraged, McEachern follows Joe until he can see the girl, then he begins shouting, “Away, Jezebel! . . . Away, harlot!” (204). Upon approaching Joe with his fist raised, Mr. McEachern is struck in the head with a chair by Joe, killing Mr. McEachern with one heavy blow: “Then to Joe it all rushed away, roaring, dying, leaving him in the center of the floor, the shattered chair clutched in his hand, looking down at his adopted father, McEachern lay on his back. . . . He appeared to sleep: bluntheaded, indomitable even in repose, even the blood on his forehead peaceful and quiet” (205). Joe refuses to accept McEachern’s beliefs, based heavily in biblical truths. Mr. McEachern yells at the young girl, labeling Joe’s actions as sinful and unacceptable. When Joe kills Mr. McEachern, he essentially denies religion. Joe finds himself in another situation involving religion with Joanna Burden, and the same severe retaliation ensues. Joe kills Mr. McEachern in an effort to leave him, but he does not eliminate McEachern’s lasting influence on him.

The apathy Joe has for religion as a result of the relationship he has with Mr. McEachern causes him to commit another act of violence on Joanna Burden. Joe and Joanna have a sexual relationship while Joe lives nearby. One night, Joanna informs Joe that he should go to a school for black men to become lawyers, to which Joe replies with astonishment and anger. At this point, Joe realizes that Joanna understands him to be black and that she has a sexual relationship with him while aware that he is black. Joe rejects the offer, and Joanna responds with a different suggestion; she tells Joe to kneel and pray with her: "I don't ask it. It's not I who ask it. Kneel with me" (282). Joanna does not ask him to pray; rather she instructs him to do so in the same manner that Mr. McEachern did before. Though Joe killed and left Mr. McEachern, he cannot escape the influence McEachern had on Joe's view of religion. Joe tells Joanna "no" several different times until he finally kills her. The situation with Joanna presents three paternal influences merging into one; Joe's African-American blood he inherited from his biological father, Doc Hines's opinion that being African-American is a curse, and Joe's strong dislike of Mr. McEachern's stern religious views all mesh into one instance where Joe is appalled by Joanna's suggestion that he attend a black college and her instructions for him to kneel and pray. While this displays Joe's fate as a result of his fathers' influences, Joanna experiences an inescapable fate as well.

The distaste Joanna's grandfather had for slave owners and his religion influence Joanna to retain the same beliefs, yet this influence eventually leads to her death. Joanna explains her family history and how her grandfather instilled the belief of rejecting slavery:

At times, especially on Saturday nights, he came home, still full of straight whiskey and the sound of his own ranting. Then he would wake his son (the mother was dead now and there were three daughters, all with blue eyes) with his

hard hand. "I'll learn you to hate two things," he would say, "or I'll frail the tar out of you. And those things are hell and slaveholders. Do you hear me?" (243).

Joanna's grandfather does not allow for his children to choose what they want to believe, but he threatens them with physical punishment into holding the same beliefs he holds. Many years later, her grandfather and half-brother Calvin are murdered by the hands of Colonel Sartoris, an ex-slaveholder, when arguing for African-Americans' right to vote. When explaining these events, Joanna comments, "Grandpa was the last of ten, and father was the last of two, and Calvin was the last of all" (248). Joanna notes the decaying family line as started by her often drunken grandfather and his anti-slavery beliefs; it is his position on slavery that initiates the eventual dissipation of the family through the generations. Like her grandfather and half-brother, it is Joanna's passion for protecting African Americans and supporting their rights that leads to her death. Her grandfather's beliefs influenced her and her brother, resulting in the passing of anti-slavery beliefs and the death of each as a result of these beliefs. Irwin agrees that Joanna "will not give the townspeople the satisfaction of thinking that they were finally able to run the Burdens out of town" because of their liberal beliefs (62). Still confused about his identity and outraged that she tells him to pray with him, Joe murders Joanna even though she provides for him and has a relationship with him; Joanna cannot escape the fate of dying for her passion, protecting African-American rights and her religion, which she inherited from her grandfather. Joanna's father has a passive stance on African-American rights; thus, her grandfather serves as her main influence. Similarly, Faulkner's main influence came from his great-grandfather, not Murry Falkner. Though this sequence of events that begins with her grandfather presents a common theme in Faulkner's fiction, Faulkner provides a bit more personal taste to the situation.

The description of Joanna's father and the way her grandfather treats him resemble Faulkner's own struggles with his father. Murry Falkner often harassed William for his looks and his short stature. William Faulkner inherited his mother's facial features, the most dominant features being his beak-like nose and his thin lips, which Murry often referred to as "snake lips." When Joanna tells Joe about an altercation between her father and grandfather, she describes, "They locked, the strap arrested: face to face and breast to breast they stood: the old man with his gaunt, grizzled face and his pale New England eyes, and the young one who bore no resemblance to him at all, with his beaked nose and his white teeth smiling" (246). The reference to the "beaked nose" reveals Faulkner integrating personal features and experiences into his fiction. Another example is Joanna's grandfather's description of his grandson: "He's got a man's build, anyway, for all his black look. By God, he's going to be as big a man as his grandpappy; not a runt like his pa" (248). Faulkner's father and brothers were each around six feet tall while Faulkner was a meager five foot six inches. Often considered a runt, he struggled to gain the recognition his stronger built brothers received in athletics. Again, the altercation between father and son as well as the father's harassment of the son's physical features depicts the integration of Faulkner's own personal struggles with his father mixed with his fiction, which he does with Percy Grimm.

Percy Grimm's aspirations to fight in war and his relationship to his father reflect similar beliefs and experiences William Faulkner had with Murry Falkner. Percy desires to fight in a war to earn honor and respect as a man. He sees this act as the defining line between being a boy and a man; however, he was not of age to enter the war before it ended. The narrator describes, "He was too young to have been in the European War, though it was not until 1921 or '22 that he realized that he would never forgive his parents for that fact" (450). Percy holds his parents

responsible for missing what he considers the defining events of manhood, serving in the military during a time of war. Faulkner felt that fighting in a war was a chivalrous and heroic act, which is why he attempted to join the military. Faulkner admits, “I was waiting, biding, until I would be old enough or free enough or anyway could get to France and become glorious and beribboned too” (qtd. in Blotner 181). However, Faulkner’s first attempt to enter the armed forces failed as “he was rejected as under regulation weight and height” (Blotner 196). Percy Grimm may not face the same physical restraints Faulkner did, but Grimm is too young to enlist in the military before the war is over. Faulkner joined the Royal Air Force in Canada, but like Percy Grimm, the war ended before he was able to fight in the war. The narrator continues to discuss Percy’s father’s perception of his son: “His father, a hardware merchant, did not understand this. He thought that the boy was just lazy and in a fair way to become perfectly worthless, when in reality the boy was suffering from the terrible tragedy of having been born not alone too late but not late enough to have escaped first hand knowledge of the lost time when he should have been a man instead of a child” (450). Faulkner and Percy believe that boys who enter the war return as men, which is the reason they want to fight in the war.

Like Percy’s father’s view that Percy is “lazy and worthless,” Murry often considered William’s writing career to be worthless and his performance in school to be lazy. Murry and his father often thought William was “not doing anything with his life,” so Faulkner’s grandfather provided William with a job at his bank. William appeared to be lazy in many of his endeavors including school, and Percy displays a similar apathy for school. Emphasizing the reason why Percy sought the chance to enter the armed forces and the positive view of its promises, the narrator observes, “Then suddenly his life opened definite and clear. The wasted years in which he had shown no ability in school, in which he had been known as lazy, recalcitrant, without

ambition, were behind him, forgotten” (451). Percy continues to form a group of men affiliated with the American Legion, to find and kill Joe Christmas since he did not receive the chance to fight in the war; he uses this opportunity to earn his manhood despite what others tell him. The commander of the Legion argues, “I still don’t think that there is any need of it. And if there was, we would all have to act as civilians. I couldn’t use the Post like that. After all, we are not soldiers now” (452). Percy wants the platoon to be recognized as government representatives, but the men and the commander inform him that they should not; the men acknowledge that this matter should be dealt with by the Sheriff and that the Legion does not have any involvement in it. Percy wants to handle the situation with men from the legion in their uniforms to fulfill his desire to fight in a war though this situation is not considered to be one. Percy’s struggle to fight in a war setting signals his inability to escape the circle of his father’s pessimism towards his desire to be a soldier and the fact that he never received the chance to do so before because of his parents.

Another example of a strained relationship between father and son that is similar to Faulkner and his father’s relationship is that of Reverend Hightower and his father. Hightower, a former pastor who is forced out of his church after the mysterious death of his estranged wife, admires his grandfather while he merely tolerates his father. The narrator states, “When he knew that his father had gone to call upon one of his country patients and would not possibly return before dark, he would go to the kitchen and say to the Negro woman: ‘Tell again about grandpa. How many Yankees did he kill?’ And when he listened now it was without terror. It was not even triumph: it was pride” (470). The one story that Hightower consistently remembers and tells the townspeople is about his grandfather’s death as the narrator notes, “It was as if he couldn’t get religion and that galloping cavalry and his dead grandfather shot from the galloping

horse untangled from each other, even in the pulpit. And that he could not untangle them in his private life, at home either, perhaps” (62). Like Hightower, Faulkner was in awe of his great-grandfather’s Civil War stories and his chivalrous reputation. Also like Hightower, Faulkner mixes his admiration for his grandfather’s valiant efforts during the Civil War into his fiction, creating such characters as Colonel Sartoris, who represents the legendary Southern Civil War hero who organized his own regiment and continued fighting despite the ensuing defeat.

Contrasting the admiration for the grandfather figure, the narrator points out the relationship Hightower had with his father: “Their relations were peaceable enough, being on the son’s part a cold, humorless, automatically respectful reserve, and on the father’s a bluff, direct, coarsely vivid humor which lacked less of purport than wit” (470). The “peaceable enough” relationship suggests that Hightower tolerates his father as Faulkner did his own. The distance between Hightower and his father is shown through his father’s reaction to discovering his son’s routine every Sunday morning: “He found that the son, then just turned twenty[-]one, was riding sixteen miles each Sunday to preach in a small Presbyterian chapel back in the hills. The father laughed. The son listened to the laughter as he would if it had been shouts or curses: with a cold and respectful detachment, saying nothing” (468). Though the father was a minister before, he mocks his son because he does not have faith that the son will succeed. This lack of faith derives from the belief that the son cannot escape the failures of the father since his father did not succeed as a minister.

Hightower’s relationship with his father haunts him throughout his life, which causes him to circle back to the same fate his father experienced before him. Some may argue that his father’s influence is what causes Hightower to fail as a minister; however, the narrator declares that Hightower inherited his fate at birth: “He was just unlucky. He was just born unlucky. So

the people quit coming to the church at all, even the ones from the other churches who had come out of curiosity for a time; he was not longer even a show now; he was now only an outrage” (69). Suggesting Hightower is born unlucky means that he cannot avoid the fate he inherited; since his father failed as a minister, he eventually does so as well. The narrator emphasizes the power of influence Hightower’s father has had on him when he reports, “[Hightower] found no terror in the knowledge that his grandfather on the contrary had killed men ‘by the hundreds’ as he was told and believed, . . . No horror here because they were just ghosts, never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm; while the father which he knew and feared was a phantom which would never die” (477). He knows his grandfather only through the stories people tell him, and this keeps him from being ashamed of his grandfather’s acts; however, Hightower’s experience and relationship with his father continue to haunt him long after his father’s death.

Some critics consider Hightower’s grandfather’s death to have a negative impact on Hightower. Irwin argues that the grandfather’s image haunts Hightower, forcing him to remain in Jefferson even after being removed from his church. He recalls the end of his grandfather’s life as it has “arrested the flow of time in Hightower’s life” (62). Hightower’s residence in Jefferson does connect with his grandfather’s presence there many years before; however, Hightower recalls his grandfather’s death with excitement and passion as acknowledged by his congregation, and the narrator comments that his grandfather’s influence does not haunt him as Hightower’s father’s does because Hightower never knew his grandfather. Lee Jenkins, author of “Psychoanalytic Conceptualizations of Characterization, or Nobody Laughs in *Light in August*,” grants that Hightower looks to his grandfather in a positive manner:

[Hightower] wants to make an identification with the grandfather, to become him.

He says that his only salvation was to return to the place to die where his life had

already ceased before it had begun. He seeks life, sustenance, a sense of being alive; and he also seeks identity, by means of masculine assertion. He seeks this, however, in a death scene, indicating the irrevocable conviction he has of the impossibility of rectifying his compromised selfhood. (217)

His struggle to identify himself with his heroic grandfather fails as his fate is sealed by his father's influence. He lives with the ghost of his father mocking his attempts to be a pastor, which he predictably does not succeed at doing. The narrator describes, "That son grew to manhood among phantoms, and side by side with a ghost. The phantoms were his father, his mother, and an old Negro woman. The father who had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy, and who in defeat had combined the two and become a doctor, a surgeon" (474). Interestingly, Hightower becomes a doctor as well. After his failure as a pastor, he takes a medical book from his study and uses it to help deliver Lena Grove's child. Just like Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Percy Grimm, Hightower cannot escape the circle that began with his father's failure, leading him back to the same failure and eventual recognition as a doctor that his father experienced.

While the influence of father and grandfather in the figures is obvious, some critics believe Faulkner tries to depict Mrs. McEachern, Mrs. Hines, and Joanna Burden as the reason that the men are so aggressive and influentially powerful. Jenkins contends that "a central issue underlying *Light in August* is a disturbance in the experience of mothering, or nurturing, whether as a result of mothering figures who are threatening, intrusive, or absent, or as a result of the way the nurturing function is taken over by others, sometimes men, in a distorting fashion" (212). Undoubtedly, the women do appear to retain weak roles in the lives of the main characters, and the men maintain a powerful influence as a result of the lack of nurture on the part of the women;

however, this unbalanced nurture does not suggest that women should be “fear[ed] [as] corruptors, schemers, [or] repositories of filth” as Jenkins states that Hines and McEachern perceive women to be (213). The men’s influence on their descendants is strengthened by the weakness of the maternal figures in the book, highlighting the theme of dysfunctional father figures in the book. Doc Hines claims to be an instrument of God when he kills his daughter’s lover, allows his daughter to die, and initiates the lynching of his own grandson. McEachern finds fault in Joe and Mrs. McEachern, telling them to pray for forgiveness for their actions, yet he physically abuses Joe when Joe refuses to learn the Bible verses. The actions of both men reveal a hypocritical truth about their natures and disprove their view of women as the source of evil. Though Jenkins does find a truth in the weak or absent influence of women, the idea that this depicts women in a negative light instead of providing a direct focus on the influence of dysfunctional father figures on their children and grandchildren should not be seen as a “central issue.” The central issue throughout the book is the struggle to break away from the circle that the characters find themselves in.

The only character that is not bound by a circle created by a father figure is Byron Bunch, who serves as a surrogate father figure for Lena Grove’s child. Lena becomes pregnant by Lucas Burch, and she believes that he will send for her once he reaches the next city; however, Lucas does not and never intended to do so. He lies to Lena and embodies the role of the absent father figure. Lucas then finds himself entangled with the investigation of Joe Christmas while Byron Bunch cares for Lena Grove. Interestingly, Faulkner does not provide any account of Byron’s parents in the novel, eliminating the possibility of an inescapable circle created by a father figure. While Lucas does not stay with Lena Grove and becomes the absent father figure, Byron Bunch assumes the role of the father. Carolyn Porter, author of “Symbolic Fathers and Dead

Mothers: A Feminist Approach to Faulkner,” concludes, “Byron Bunch represents the other—that defined by the father who becomes a father precisely by accepting his lack, specifically by understanding and agreeing to his lack of the phallus, and thereby assuming the role of the father in patriarchy as Lacan defines it, where the father lacks the very phallus on which his status as father depends” (82). Byron, the only figure in the novel to “accept his lack,” is not bound by any circle because of his acceptance.

The circles created by father and grandfather figures, which imprison their descendants, prove to be one of the main themes of *Light in August*. Though other themes and messages exist in the novel such as racial tension and the hypocrisy of religion in the South, the troubled pasts of the characters support the idea of an inescapable fate inherited by the familial descendants. Each character does not embrace their inherited flaw except for Byron Bunch; he accepts his lack as a father, and in doing so, he is able to assume the role of a surrogate father. The struggle to break free of the past as set forth by ancestors while in the present proves to be a recurring theme in Faulkner’s literature, depicting the power of dysfunctional father figures over their children.

Chapter 5

Mr. Compson's "Sound" Advice: The Harmful Effects of A Dysfunctional Patriarch

While many dysfunctional father figures exist in Faulkner's fiction, Jason Compson, Sr. in *The Sound and the Fury* proves to be one of the most important dysfunctional father figures because of how Faulkner depicts Quentin and Jason Compson, Jr.'s struggles to function in society and cope with their flaws. While the separation of narrators reflects the same narrative structure seen in *As I Lay Dying*, the example of a dysfunctional father figure in *The Sound and the Fury* proves to be most intriguing because of how closely the father resembles Murry Faulkner and how the sons favor the feelings carried by Faulkner. The family line begins to decay with Jason Compson, Sr. and ends when Quentin Compson, Caddy's child, runs away with a traveling man, attempting to flee the decaying line of the Compsons. While Jason Compson, Sr. repeatedly gives instructions to his children throughout the novel, he lacks the authority of the father as he consistently uses his wife's illness as a reason for the children to behave; his reliance on the wife's authority parallels Anse Bundren's use of his wife's death to support his selfish desires. When Mr. Compson does give advice without the mention of his wife's illness, his pessimistic nature infects the minds of his children, Quentin Compson being the most apparent example of this. The personal narratives of Benjy, Quentin, Jason, and Dilsey provide the multiple perspectives of each of the children, combining to exhibit the children's inability to accept their flaws that they inherited from their cynical father. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Jason Compson, Sr. transmits his weakness and cynical thoughts to his children, causing the line of a once aristocratic and well-respected family to decay and leaving his descendants struggling to overcome their inherited flaws.

Mrs. Compson's comments about Mr. Compson show that he is the source of the family's dysfunctional status. Quentin evokes his mother's words: "Jason I must go away you keep the others I'll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he'll have a chance to grow up and forget all this the others don't love me they have never loved anything with that streak of Compson selfishness and false pride Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread" (102). Mrs. Compson does not want Jason Compson, Jr. to become like her husband as the other, older children already have done. The special treatment Mrs. Compson gives Jason Compson, Jr., because he resembles her family instead of Mr. Compson's, resembles the affection Maud Falkner had for William, who had a passion for the arts and retained the characteristics of her family; however, Maud did not show favor to William over the other boys as Mrs. Compson does with Jason. Mrs. Compson continues, "Jason pulling at my heart all the while but I see now that I have not suffered enough I see now that I must pay for your sins as well as mine what have you done what sins have your high and mighty people visited upon me but you'll take up for them you always have found excuses for your own blood only Jason can do wrong because he is more Bascomb than Compson" (103). In the eyes of Mrs. Compson, Jason is the only child that does not cause trouble while Mr. Compson treats him differently because he has the characteristics of a Bascomb; this situation reflects the consistent snide comments Murry Faulkner made about William Faulkner because he resembled his mother's family. Continuing her testimony against her husband, Mrs. Compson declares, "I know you don't love him that you wish to believe faults against him you never have yes ridicule him as you always have Maury you cannot hurt me any more than your children already have" (103). Again, Mr. Compson ridicules his son, which echoes how Murry picked on William for not only his appearance but his choice of career. Also, the name "Maury" in the middle of the statement is rather peculiar

because Mrs. Compson's brother's name is Maury, yet this statement is only part of the long section discussing her desire to take Jason Compson, Jr. away from the family. Her brother does not appear to have any ties to this section other than being a Bascomb, but Mrs. Compson makes it clear that she is talking about her son, Jason, when she refers to being "more Bascomb than Compson" (103). It is possible to connect the presence of the name "Maury" in Mrs. Compson's discussion of how Mr. Compson mocks one son in particular to Murry Falkner since he so often badgered William throughout his childhood and not his brothers, yet this conclusion is only a possibility amidst other connections between Mr. Compson and Murry Falkner. Mr. Compson fails as a father figure in *The Sound and the Fury* because he struggles to discipline the children, drinks the family into debt, and provides a pessimistic view of life instead of positive thoughts through the advice he gives his children.

Though many agree that Mr. Compson is the source of the family's decay, some critics argue that Mrs. Compson plays a pivotal role in the dysfunctional family. Gwendolyn Chabrier, author of *Faulkner's Families: A Southern Saga*, points out that "Caroline Compson is completely self-involved, a self-pitying hypochondriac unable to give her children the minimal emotion they require except, of course, for Jason whom she favors and even smothers with love at the expense of others" (108-9). Mrs. Compson does favor Jason Compson, Jr. more than the other children; however, this is because of how Mr. Compson treats Jason. She protects him while Mr. Compson favors the other children, naturally causing the other children to flee to their father when they need something. With a more intense accusation, Cleanth Brooks claims, "Mrs. Compson, one of Faulkner's most brilliantly realized characters, stands at the core of the novel as she stands at the core of the family, the decay and the disintegration of the Compsons affected largely by her failure" (qtd. in Chabrier 108). Brooks ignores the connection between Mr.

Compson's pessimism and Quentin and Jason Compson, Jr.; for example, Mrs. Compson cannot be accountable for Mr. Compson's passing of his watch to Quentin, a male tradition in the Compson family, and its fatal effects on Quentin. Other critics view Mr. Compson as the source of Mrs. Compson's repetitive complaining. Linda Holland-Toll, author of "Absence Absolute: The Recurring Pattern of Faulkerian Tragedy," sees Mrs. Compson in a different way: "Although we lack a complete and contemporaneous Compson history, it is entirely possible that Caroline's mopes and megrims and incapacities, too numerous to catalogue are the result of her marriage to Mr. Compson rather than the immediate cause of her family's blight" (190). This perception of Mrs. Compson's consistent complaints makes sense because Mr. Compson is still accountable for the dysfunction of the family because of his weaknesses as well as the specific traits he passes on to his children, yet neither Compson parent can be fully responsible for their children's problems as they both exhibit character flaws.

In Benjy's narration, Mr. Compson exposes his weakness as a father as he uses Mrs. Compson's illness as a tool of authority. Through the first half of the book, Mrs. Compson suffers from an unknown illness that makes her weak, and this weakness proves to be a source of strength for Mr. Compson, showing his inability to assume the disciplinarian role of the father by himself and hinting at the strength of character that Mr. and Mrs. Compson have. Like Anse Bundren, Mr. Compson uses his wife's illness as a source of motivation for his children to behave. In an effort to settle the dispute between Caddy and Jason Compson, Jr., Mr. Compson states, "Stop that. Do you want to make Mother sick in her room" (65). Instead of asserting his power as the father of the family, Mr. Compson uses the children's affection for their mother to coax them into ceasing their dispute. Mr. Compson also appears to be a weak character as he listens to the instructions his ill wife yells at him: "Take him downstairs and get someone to

watch him, Jason. You know I'm ill" (42). Jason listens despite his frustration with having to take care of Benjy again. After Damuddy dies and Mr. Compson instructs the children to be quiet, they do not listen to his request; Caddy climbs the tree despite Jason's reiteration of his father's words and looks inside to see what is happening. Later, Mrs. Compson acknowledges, "[Mr. Compson] was always saying they didn't need controlling, that they already knew what cleanliness and honesty were, which was all that anyone could hope to be taught" (261). Mr. Compson cannot maintain a sense of authority over the children, displaying one of his significant flaws as a father and negative influence on his children.

Another negative influence Mr. Compson has on his children is the pessimistic attitude and advice he gives his children. Mr. Compson perceives life in a negative manner, often communicating this perception to his son Quentin; it is not until later in the novel that Mr. Compson's cynical attitude reemerges in Jason as he blames others for his financial troubles and makes snide remarks to his mother, his niece Quentin, and Dilsey. Mr. Compson tells Quentin about Maury's dispute with another person, and Mrs. Compson mentions Maury's poor health. Mr. Compson declares, "Bad health is the primary reason for all life. Created by disease, within putrefaction, into decay" (44). This quote serves multiple meanings as Mr. Compson is referring to the poor health of the Bascombs since both Mrs. Compson and Maury are ill; this implies that his family is the superior of the two families, which Mrs. Compson, disgusted, repeatedly mentions in the novel. Mr. Compson's comment also shows his significantly dismal perception of life. When he comments that "poor health is the primary reason for all life," he is saying that a reason for living does not exist except to die. The third meaning behind this quote refers to the decaying of the family line. The "bad health" suggests a generation that does not amount to what previous generations have done before; this "disease" that creates the "bad health" in the line of

the Compsons is Mr. Compson because of his failure as a father, his alcoholism, and his negative view of life. As a result of his failures and the negative advice he gives Quentin, the rest of the family line decays, unable to surmount the flaws they inherit from Mr. Compson.

The idea that the Compson family is superior to the Bascombs reflects the attitude Murry Falkner had about William Faulkner, who carried the genetic, physical traits of his mother's family, often picking on him and taking pride in his other sons. As previously noted, Murry Falkner referred to William Faulkner as "Snake Lips," which William did not take well, on several occasions because of the thin lips and long nose characteristics he inherited from the Butlers. Also, Murry showed great appreciation and pride for his other sons, who displayed exceptional athletic abilities and were tall like him, which William was not. This pride for his own family genes and the perception of his wife's family as inferior makes Mr. Compson similar to Murry Falkner. Mrs. Compson asserts, "My people are every bit as well born as yours" (44). Quentin later recalls, "Mother would cry and say that Father believed his people were better than hers that he was ridiculing Uncle Maury to teach us the same thing" (175). Mr. Compson may not boldly declare this belief, but his actions and the way he perceives Maury as incompetent reveal his idea that the Bascombs are inferior to the Compsons. Mr. Compson views Maury as useless when he complains about his being unemployed and borrowing money from Mr. Compson (175). Quentin recalls his father's words: "Do you think so because one of our forefathers was a governor and three were generals and Mother's weren't" (101). The Compson family line retains high ranking and respectable ancestors, but the Bascombs do not as Mr. Compson tells Quentin; this shows that Mr. Compson perceives his family to be the higher of the two families because they held highly respectable and noteworthy positions while the Bascombs

did not. This belief of superiority proves to be otherwise as Mr. Compson is the disease that causes the decay of the family line as he passes his weaknesses to his children.

Mr. Compson's pessimistic view of life and his alcoholism, traits of a dysfunctional father, start the collapse of the family's success and honor. Early in the novel, there are no signs of the Compsons struggling financially, nor is there any mention of Mr. Compson drinking; however, his addiction becomes apparent in Quentin's section. Quentin recollects, "Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn't stop drinking and he won't stop he can't stop since I since last summer and then they'll send Benjy to Jackson" (124). His father's alcoholism proves to be fatal, and the repercussions of this event will lead to Benjy's departure from the household later in the novel. Later, Jason Compson emphasizes, "I never had time to go to Harvard or drink myself into the ground" (181). Jason's comment on his father's drinking acknowledges that Mr. Compson's alcoholism drained the family's finances; this means his alcoholism and his decision to sell the land for Quentin to go to Harvard are the reasons that the finances significantly dwindle. Mr. Compson drinks heavily just as Murry Faulkner often did, exhibiting another connection between the fictional character and Faulkner's father.

The other trait of Mr. Compson that causes the psychological decay of the family is his consistently negative view of life, which influences Quentin more than any of the other Compson children. Other than the comment about bad health and the reason for life mentioned earlier, the first of many gloomy comments appears in Quentin's section as Mr. Compson teaches Quentin that "no battle is ever won. . . They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools" (76). This message of hopelessness and inferiority as revealed by "the field" or the world remains with Quentin throughout the novel as he fights to succeed in reviving the honor of the family name by

attempting to fight Gerald Bland and losing horribly, to do well in college, to escape his virginity, and to help the little Italian girl. Despite his attempts to overcome these obstacles, Quentin fails miserably in each one: Bland easily beats him, he is unofficially expelled from college because of missing classes, he is unable to hide that he is a virgin from Caddy, and he is arrested for kidnapping the Italian girl. Though he attempts to overcome adversity in each of these situations, he is always presented with a misfortunate ending. He cannot escape the words of his father despite his efforts to change his nature.

Quentin believes that being a virgin makes him flawed because that is what Mr. Compson tells him. Struggling to cope with Caddy's sin, Quentin tells his father that he is the reason that Caddy is pregnant, and his father instructs him that Caddy's sin is not the problem. Quentin recollects, "And Father said it's because you are a virgin: don't you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don't know You can't know and he said Yes" (116). The claim that women are "never virgins" shows Mr. Compson's constant hopeless beliefs; he never makes positive comments to his son. Also, Quentin's disagreement with his father about whether Mr. Compson "knows" this as a fact marks a time when Quentin was not affected by his father's beliefs about virginity. Before Mr. Compson says anything, Quentin does not signal any problems with being a virgin, but after his father tells him it is a "negative state," Quentin wrestles with this idea for the rest of the novel. At the point of the discussion between father and son, Quentin is confused about the perception of virginity as negative or positive; however, later in the novel, Quentin tries to rid himself of his virginity through words and not actions, signaling his belief that it is a negative state as his father told him before. Caddy asks, "You've never done that have you. . . that what I have what I did."

Quentin replies, ““Yes yes lots of times with lots of girls’ . . . then I was crying” (151). He strives to hide his virginity and convince himself that he is not a virgin, yet Caddy knows that Quentin is a virgin. Unable to reject her claim, Quentin breaks down, ashamed of his nature because of his father’s attitude. Quentin reflects, “I thought about how I’d thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it wouldn’t be anything and if it wasn’t anything, what was I” (147). Quentin’s last comment, “[If virginity] wasn’t anything, what was I,” shows that Quentin identifies himself by his virginity; he believes that this mark is part of his nature, which is not positive because of his father’s words. Quentin cannot escape his virginity; thus, he is ashamed and imprisoned by the words of his father.

Mr. Compson’s advice about time and his gift of the watch to Quentin prove to be the most detrimental of all of his father’s influences because they haunt Quentin throughout his life and ultimately lead to his death. At the beginning of Quentin’s narration, he observes, “When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight oclock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch” (76). Though Quentin does not look at his watch, he knows what time it is because of where the shadow is, similar to how someone can determine the time by looking at the shadow of a sundial. His reference to being “in time again” and “hearing the watch” implies that he left it only to return to time again, which his father teaches him. Quentin recollects his father’s gift and advice that haunts him throughout his life:

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 may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all of your breath trying to conquer it. (76)

This brief explanation of the meaning of the watch and why Mr. Compson gives it to Quentin summarizes Quentin's narration. First, Mr. Compson inherited the watch from his father, noting a father to son connection through each generation. Interestingly, the explanation Mr. Compson provides Quentin may not be the same explanation that Quentin's grandfather gave Mr. Compson; the only reason Mr. Compson gives Quentin is his own, marking a significant and direct influence from Mr. Compson's generation to Quentin's. Part of Mr. Compson's advice regards the watch as "the mausoleum of all hope and desire," which suggests that the watch is a tomb for hope and desire; the watch will bury hope and desire for Quentin as it never ceases to measure time. His father's next words serve a double meaning as he says, "it's rather excruciating-ly apt" (76). The hyphen between excruciating and -ly separates the two, showing the word "excruciating" used as a participial adjective and an adverb when the "-ly" ending is added. "It's rather excruciating" indicates the suffering that the watch will bring Quentin in his life because he will not be able to escape it. When "excruciating" is used as an adverb, the father suggests that it is highly likely that Quentin will try to use the watch to understand life as his grandfather had done before. Mr. Compson refers to this as "reducto absurdum," signaling his negative and pointless perception of such a thought. Finally, Mr. Compson comments that though the watch measures time consistently, Quentin should occasionally forget about it because he will have it with him every day; if he has the watch, he will perceive it as a normal item that he uses without thought.

Adding to his previous explanation of the watch, Mr. Compson tells Quentin about his perception of clocks and time. Quentin remembers the pessimistic words of his father when Quentin notes, “Father said clocks slay time. He 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” (85). The progressive ticking of wheels implies a degenerative process, counting down as the body grows older and weaker, and disease initiates the decaying of the body and life; this hopeless perspective echoes Mr. Compson’s comments to Quentin earlier in the novel regarding disease and the decaying of life. Though Mr. Compson’s comment may seem more philosophical than negative, the quote haunts Quentin as he is unable to escape the ticking of the watch. Quentin breaks the glass of the watch and twists the hands off, leaving the face of the clock marked only by its numbers, yet it still ticks continuously, marking the passing of time without acknowledging the measurement of it (80). His futile effort to destroy the watch as a measurement of time fails because the ticking of the mechanical gears inside of the watch continues, and Mr. Compson’s explanation of the clicking of the wheels remains with Quentin as he can still hear the watch. On several occasions, Quentin hears his watch ticking despite its faceless appearance: “I could hear my watch ticking away in my pocket and after a while I had all the other sounds shut away, leaving only the watch in my pocket” (83). After struggling to forget and escape time on several occasions and trying to destroy the watch, Quentin realizes that his efforts are useless and that he cannot escape time; however, it is his father’s influence and words that he can never escape since it is Mr. Compson who provides Quentin with this perception of time and with the watch. Quentin realizes, “It was propped against the collar box and I lay listening to it. Hearing it, that is. I don’t suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You don’t have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind

unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear" (76). Quentin understands that though he can remember his experiences in the past and focus on other experiences in the present, he will always be reminded of the consistent and deliberate ticking of time and the words his father instilled in him.

Mr. Compson connects his pessimistic view of life and time together, leaving Quentin with little hope in life. One of the most pivotal examples of the pessimistic outlook on life that Mr. Compson instills in Quentin is his explanation of the measure of a man's life: "Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune would be tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said. A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged. You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity" (104). Not only does the experience of life present misfortune, Mr. Compson comments that the passing of time is misfortune as well. Quentin's next statement is "I could hear my watch whenever the car stopped" (104). He is unable to see life as anything except misfortune since he cannot care for Caddy as he wants to, succeed in school at Harvard, escape virginity, or help the little Italian girl; outside of his misfortunes, all that is left is the constant ticking of the watch, reminding Quentin of the negative progression of life. Quentin cannot escape the "slaying of time" as his father informed him; thus, Quentin becomes overwhelmed by his failures and his father's advice.

Quentin eventually succumbs to the pressures of life and the words of his father, ultimately inheriting not only his father's habits and watch, but also his perception of life. Quentin concludes, "I am. Drink. I was not. Let us sell Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard and I may knock my bones together and together. I will be dead in. Was it one year Caddy said. Shreve has a bottle in his trunk" (174). Quentin mentions drinking and his death, reflecting his father's alcoholism and his coming death as a result of the addiction. Though

Quentin does not die from alcoholism, this passing of the addiction from one generation to the next mirrors the same addiction Faulkner inherited from Murry Falkner. Quentin's statement signals his surrender to his father's influence, no longer fighting to overcome his misfortunes but embracing them instead. After receiving his father's view of life, Quentin begins to discuss his past perception of death and his ancestors as honorable:

It used to be I thought of death as a man something like Grandfather a friend of his a kind of private and particular friend. . . . I always thought of them as being together somewhere all the time waiting for old Colonel Sartoris to come down and sit with them. . . . Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were always talking and Grandfather was always right. (176)

Quentin's previous perception reflects a rather positive outlook on death and the admiration and respect he had for his grandfather. Colonel Sartoris, often analyzed as a fictional character closely related to William Faulkner's great-grandfather, a man who Faulkner respected and revered with high regard, is connected to Quentin's grandfather, signaling the respect Quentin had for his grandfather. Interestingly, Quentin notes that this perception of death as a union of grand figures "was" how he perceived it to be; however, he now understands life and death as his father does, contrasting the respect he has for his grandfather with the lack thereof he has for his father. Quentin reasons, "[Father taught us that] all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away" (175). This suggests that life holds no special value; life is made of the same experiences of previous men. Quentin experiences life with the same misfortune that Mr. Compson alludes to in the beginning of Quentin's narration. Quentin yields to his idea of life as a failure,

acknowledging his lack of success in life. Doreen Fowler, author of “‘Little Sister Death’: *The Sound and the Fury* and the Denied Unconscious,” acknowledges, “All of the experiences which Quentin obsessively rehearses seem to culminate in failure. . . . Given these cumulative failures, it seems safe to conclude that Quentin suffers feelings of masculine inadequacy” (8). The failures Fowler notes include his inability to save Caddy’s honor after she becomes pregnant, the confusion and problems with returning the little Italian girl home, and Gerald Bland’s beating him (8). His “masculine inadequacy” can be directly related to the advice his father gives him, which makes Quentin believe that he is the inferior because he is a virgin. Settling on the belief of his life as a failure, Quentin speculates, “A fine dead sound we will swap Benjy’s pasture for a fine dead sound” (174). The dead sound indicates Quentin’s decision to commit suicide since the ticking of watches will no longer bother him once he is dead. Holland-Toll analyzes the statue of Colonel Sartoris in *Flags in the Dust* and the watch in *The Sound and the Fury*:

Both are reminders that death is a paramount web of significance in Faulkner, a web self-spun, which inexorably destroys the ability to live life on any positive communal terms. The watch as a ticking mausoleum aptly focuses attention on Mr. Compson’s view of life as despair, and it is this metaphor, so closely linked with Mr. Compson, which drives Quentin to literal death. (188-89)

The watch reminds Quentin of his father, echoing his cynical attitude towards life; therefore, in an effort to escape time, his failures in life, and his father’s words of influence, Quentin commits suicide.

While Mr. Compson’s influence on Jason Compson, Jr. does not lead to Jason’s death, it does have a lasting effect on his perception of the family. As documented earlier, Mr. Compson ridicules Jason and treats him differently than he does the other Compson children. Not only

does Mr. Compson treat Jason differently, he provides for Quentin's education and does not have any money to support Jason when he is older. His father's decision to pay for Quentin's education, which inevitably leaves Jason with debts after Mr. Compson's death, causes part of Jason's obsession with money. Also, when Jason does have a job promised to him by Herbert, the promise is retracted when Caddy and Herbert split, adding to Jason's fixation on money. Because of Mr. Compson's attitude towards Jason, Quentin's education at Harvard, and Caddy's actions that cause him to lose his job, Jason has a disgruntled attitude towards the rest of the family, often displaying a pessimistic attitude that his father had before him. Jason's narration begins with "[o]nce a bitch always a bitch, what I say" (180). Jason is referring to his niece, Quentin, who is Caddy's daughter. Part of Jason's animosity for his niece is his dislike for Caddy. His niece becomes the object of his frustration and anger since Caddy causes him to lose his opportunity of attaining a bank position. Jason takes money from his niece, which Quentin receives from Caddy, as a mode of revenge against Caddy.

The other part of Jason's bitterness relates to his responsibility as the oldest and last male of the family to take care of Quentin and his other relatives. Since Mr. Compson passed away, Jason is responsible for taking care of the family and the servants. Jason points out that "I never had time to be [a Compson]. I never had time to go to Harvard or drink myself into the ground. I had to work" (181). Jason's references to his brother and his father suggest that he has not had the chance to waste his time or life away as they did; he could only work to take care of everyone else and debts left by his father. Referring to Benjy, Jason concludes, "Like I say, if we've got to feed another mouth and she won't take that money, why not send him down to Jackson. He'll be happier there, with people like him" (221). Jason prefers sending Benjy away because Benjy is a financial burden in Jason's eyes. Jason's obsession with money reveals a flaw in his character.

Fowler argues, “Money compensates [Jason] for a sense of diminishment, the same loss of father-power Quentin feels” (9). Jason’s need for money is his way of gaining masculinity and retaining the surrogate-father figure role in the household. William Faulkner often complained about his father’s debts, leaving William, the oldest of the sons, to inherit them; William was often frustrated with his need to make money to financially support his family members whom he felt he was not responsible for. Jason’s frustration with having to take care of the family because his father died at an early age causes him to display animosity to his father.

Jason does not respect his father because Jason blames Mr. Compson for his unfortunate situation. Jason states, “Father wouldn’t even come down town anymore but just sat there all day with the decanter I could see the bottom of his nightshirt and his bare legs and hear the decanter clinking until finally T. P. had to pour it for him and she says You have no respect for your Father’s memory and I says I don’t know why not it sure is preserved well enough to last only if I’m crazy too” (233). Jason criticizes his father’s apathy though his poor health was the main reason for it. His comment about his father’s memory lasting if he is “crazy too” implies that he realizes that the dysfunction of the Compson family is a result of Mr. Compson’s actions and decisions. He considers his siblings to be crazy, which can easily be seen through Quentin’s fixation with time, Caddy’s promiscuity, and Benjy’s mental handicap; thus, Jason suggests that Mr. Compson’s memory will only live through him if he becomes crazy too since the other members are dead, dumb, or absent.

Like Quentin, Jason attempts to escape the decay of the Compson family as passed on by his father. Just as Quentin’s narration begins with the passing of the watch and his father’s advice, Jason begins in an unfortunate situation, inheriting the debts of his family when his father dies, relegating him to a life of work without the hope of an education like Quentin’s or a steady

job that was promised to Jason before. In order to break away from this circle of debt, Jason seeks restitution for what he has lost and inherited; thus, he intercepts the letters Caddy sends her daughter and steals the money from the envelope, believing it to be repayment for the job Caddy cost him. Caddy writes, "I've had no answer to the last two letters I wrote her, though the check in the second one was cashed with the other check. . . . You are opening my letters to her. I know that as well as if I were looking at you" (190). Jason hoards the money and keeps it safely hidden at the Compson house; by taking the money intended for Caddy's daughter and by attempting to control her daughter as a surrogate father, Jason attempts to flee his unfortunate circumstances. As Quentin occasionally believes he escapes the constraints of time and his father's advice, Jason believes that he escapes the debt of his father and exacts revenge for losing his job opportunity. Like Quentin, Jason realizes that his efforts are futile, and he is still bound by his father's debt. Caddy's daughter steals the money Jason stashes in his room and runs away with a young man. Upon realizing she is missing, Jason searches for the money instead of her, exhibiting his concern for money instead of his family: "He was hurling things backward out of the closet, garments, shoes, a suitcase. Then he emerged carrying a sawn section of the closet again and emerged with a metal box. . . and for a time longer he stood with the selected key in his hand, looking at the broken lock" (284). Jason calls the police to report a robbery, again showing his concern for the money instead of his niece. The narrator relates, "Of his niece he did not think at all, nor of the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years; together they merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it" (306). Jason's security, the three thousand dollars he collected from Caddy's letters, and his way of receiving the money, Quentin, are gone, and again Jason is left with his father's debt and without any repayment for losing his job just as he started

at the beginning of his narration. When Jason finds the traveling show where he believes the boy and Quentin are, Jason aggressively asks an old man where the young couple is. After calling the old man a liar, the old man fights Jason, forcing Jason out of the cart. Jason's efforts to regain his honor, to regain his source of money and sanity, are futile; he is unable to escape his fate as he inherited it from his father.

Quentin Compson finally escapes the Compson house and ends the family line, yet she also inherits the corruption. After Mrs. Compson informs Quentin that Jason "is the nearest thing to a father you've ever had," Quentin admits, "Whatever I do, it's your fault. . . . If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me" (259-60). She rebels against Jason because of the way he treats her, and he does this because he feels betrayed by his father and sister; thus, Mr. Compson's actions continue to influence the family after his death. Quentin asserts, "I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead," and Jason responds, "That's the first sensible thing she ever said" (260). When Quentin desires for the entire family to die, she is noting the decay in the Compson family, acknowledging the family as dysfunctional. Jason agrees with her statement, revealing that he concurs with her belief that the family is dysfunctional. Quentin runs away from the Compsons; however, she cannot escape the Compson influence she inherits from her experience with Jason and her grandmother. Jason serves as a negative surrogate-father figure for Quentin, trying to control her actions to keep her from following her mother's promiscuous past but displaying a harsh and pessimistic nature. He takes her money and condemns her actions, forcing her to flee the house. Interestingly, Dilsey comments in the last section that "I've seen de first en de last" (297). She is referring to Jason Compson, Sr., the first of the Compsons to begin the decay in the family line, and the last as Quentin Compson, the girl, who ends the family line. While in the kitchen, "the clock above the cupboard struck ten times," and

Dilsey comments, “One oclock. . . . Jason ain’t comin home. Ise seed de first en de last” (301).

The clock is three hours behind, symbolizing that the Compson family has decayed for three generations, not holding the respectful and honorable status it held before Jason Compson, Sr.

The decay of the Compson family derives from the pessimistic and selfish Jason Compson, Sr., continuing through each generation as an inescapable force for each descendant. While at the University of Virginia, William Faulkner stated, “Something had happened somewhere between the first Compson and Quentin,’ so that between a ‘bold ruthless’ ancestor and the suicidal Quentin, ‘what should have been a princely line . . . decayed’” (qtd. in Porter 85). The strong similarities between Mr. Compson and Murry Faulkner strengthen the idea of William Faulkner’s use of dysfunctional father figures in his fiction to reflect his experiences with his own father. Pessimism, alcoholism, and debt are all traits of Murry Falkner and Mr. Compson, and they passed the same traits to their children, Murry to William Faulkner and Jason Compson, Sr. to the Compsons. The characteristics of fathers influence their children; however, William Faulkner later mitigated the influence of his dysfunctional father. Faulkner recognized that his relationship with his own daughter, Jill, began to resemble his own relationship with his father. Realizing this, Faulkner strove to change his behaviors or characteristics that made him dislike his father. He was close with his children, a trait that Murry did not have. Faulkner could not change his relationship with his father, but he did transform his relationship with his children to a positive one.

Chapter 6

Present but Absent: Murry Falkner and William Faulkner's Dysfunctional Father Figures

Recurring themes or figures in the works of one author provide a glimpse of his or her perspective of life. While specific characters, settings, and situations change in William Faulkner's novels, the dysfunctional father figure proves to be one of the focal points. At times seeming more real than fictional, Faulkner's dysfunctional patriarchs mirror real stories and experiences of his grandfather and father. The influence of Murry Falkner and William Clark Falkner on William is undeniable as his ancestors appear more than once in Faulkner's fiction through similar situations or characteristics; nevertheless, it is the way in which William Faulkner presents them that displays Faulkner's philosophy of the influence patriarchs have on their children. The inescapable circle that begins with the dysfunctional father of one generation and haunts each generation of the family, evident in several of Faulkner's works, attests to his struggle to escape and to cope with the negative impact of his father, Murry Faulkner, and William's desire to regain the respect and success that his great-grandfather once held.

Faulkner wrote in order to express his feelings, especially about his father, and to find solace through the process. In 1951 Faulkner told Joan Williams, "You have to have something burning your very entrails to be said. . . writing is important only when you want to do it, and nothing nothing nothing else but writing will suffice, give you peace" (qtd. in Chabrier 29). Writing is a therapeutic method of dealing with his hostility towards his father. Chabrier finds, "Faulkner again strongly projects his personal unhappiness into his fiction. In general, children are presented as helpless victims at the mercy of their parents. They are, furthermore and to an exaggerated degree, unable to extricate themselves from their inevitable destinies" (98). The struggle of children to break free of the bonds that dysfunctional parents create is undeniably a

dominant theme in *Pylon*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *The Sound and the Fury*. Greg Porter, author of “Freud, Faulkner, Caruth: Trauma and the Politics of Literary Form,” concludes, “Faulkner’s ambivalent attachment to patriarchy and white supremacy leads him to disavow his indictment of those institutions, rewriting the traumas inflicted by them as the ineradicable truth of human being and insisting that to feel that truth is both the condition of ethical authenticity and the prelude to a literally suicidal despair” (270). The idea of such a dominant theme in his works must originate with Faulkner’s actual experiences as he acknowledged the power of experience when writing fiction. Since Faulkner had only one father figure during his childhood, the prospect of Murry Falkner being the influence and inspiration of William’s dysfunctional father figures is probable if not entirely true. The vivid accounts of children trapped by the actions and decisions of their parents and the events and characteristics closely resembling the experiences and personality of Murry Falkner provide the strong connection of dysfunctional father figures to Murry.

Faulkner embedded his experience and family into his fiction to express his understanding of them. In an interview with Jean Stein, William Faulkner explains the source of his fiction after Stein asks him the amount of life “experiences” that exist in it:

I can’t say. I never counted it up. Because “how much” is not important. A writer needs three things, experience, observation, and imagination, any two of which, at times any one of which, can supply the lack of the others. With me, a story usually begins with a single idea or memory or mental picture. The writing of the story is simply a matter of working up to that moment, to explain why it happened and what it caused to follow. A writer is trying to create believable people in credible moving situations in the most moving way he can. Obviously

he must use as one of his tools the environment which he knows. (qtd. in Stein 16-7)

Faulkner admits that he uses personal experience to generate “believable” characters effectively. William Faulkner’s dysfunctional father figures are realistic since he based them on a true example, Murry Faulkner. Chabrier points out that “Faulkner projects onto his male characters his father Murry’s weakness, as well as manifesting his own desire to rid himself entirely of this paternal figure” (21). The lack of any legitimate father figure or the lack of anyone assuming that role in *Pylon*; the struggles of the Bundrens because of the decisions made by Anse in *As I Lay Dying*; the inability of Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Reverend Hightower to break free of the circles of fate created by their ancestors in *Light in August*; and Mr. Compson’s cynical and haunting advice to Quentin as well as his actions that decide Jason and Benjy’s futures in *The Sound and the Fury* all exhibit weaknesses that Faulkner saw in his own father. Murry often remained cynical about Faulkner’s writing career, lost his job and hope when his father sold the railroad, forcing him to settle for less respectable positions compared to previous Falkners who were attorneys, and ultimately did not appear to be a functional father figure in the eyes of his son, William, who often viewed him as a lack more than as a father. Murry Faulkner remains the one person used most in Faulkner’s fiction, exhibiting Faulkner’s efforts to release the animosity he held for his father.

Though Faulkner’s fiction consistently reveals problems for children of dysfunctional father figures, Faulkner did note the importance and joy of healthy parent-child relationships. In a letter to his mother, Faulkner writes, “Everything in the gardens is for children—its beautiful the way the French love their babies. They treat children as though they were the same age as the grown-ups—they walked along the street together, a man or a woman and a child, talking and

laughing together as though they were the same age” (18 Aug 1925). The next letter he sends her mentions the same admiration for how the parent-child relationship that he sees in France is pleasant (23 Aug 1925). Faulkner’s respect for how children are treated as adults shows Faulkner’s appreciation for respect from parents, which he often did not receive from his cynical father. Faulkner experienced a troubled father-son relationship, and this experience of seeing French parent-child relationships allows him to compare the two, probably noticing how influential his father’s actions were on him.

Most readers cannot overlook the numerous dysfunctional father figures in Faulkner’s works. Critics agree that a significant void in the role of a parent in Faulkner’s fiction creates turmoil in the lives of his or her children. While some critics believe that the mother causes the decay, the evidence points to the fathers, as they are the ones who make the decisions that haunt their children. Still, much more research and scholarship can be committed to identifying dysfunctional father figures in Faulkner’s fiction. One possible figure to focus on is Gavin Stevens, who serves more as a positive surrogate father figure to Chick Mallison. Analyzing why he appears in a more positive light may reveal an interesting change in Faulkner’s life when he created Gavin. Also, the Snopes trilogy, which contains one of Faulkner’s most famous dysfunctional families, should be considered when doing a similar analysis of influential father figures. Other than just examining more novels, further scholarship can be done on the children of dysfunctional father figures in order to extract certain feelings or perspectives from each one and how they relate to Faulkner. With the exception of Quentin Compson, the children of failing patriarchs do exhibit certain traits that can be related to Faulkner’s feelings; thus, trying to understand why Faulkner placed certain beliefs in specific characters could reveal more about his perspective of dysfunctional father figures. Gwendolyn Chabrier notes, “Once [Faulkner] has

resolved his own family difficulties, Faulkner's fictional families are portrayed very differently" (19). Moving from identifying dysfunctional father figures in his literature, further research on Faulkner's latter novels could show an important change or event in his life.

Though scholarship can delve further into this topic, Murry Falkner's influence on Faulkner's fiction is apparent. Murry Falkner was present as a biological father but absent in assuming the positive role of a father figure, and his characteristics are present in the fictional fathers who are all absent as well, inhabiting the role of dysfunctional fathers. In a letter to his mother, Faulkner writes, "No, I am not keeping the diary. I'll write it all someday though" (2 Sept. 1925). Faulkner may have never received the opportunity or wanted to write that diary, but much of his life and thoughts exists in his literature; thus, he technically did write it.

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