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The Compson Family Language Game: Despair, Depression, and Death in *The Sound in the Fury*

Language, a person's primary method of communication, can seem like a blessing; however, when it is used with negligence, language can have a catastrophic effect on those in ear-shot. In William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, language creates microcosms that isolate each Compson family member, especially the children. By splitting the novel into four very distinct perspectives on the Compson family, the narration presents four different representations of language and how it affects each individual: Benjy's section is filled with a repetitive wailing, Quentin's section reveals Quentin as someone who overwhelms himself with the language around him, Jason Jr.'s section explodes with the anger he feels because of his family, and Dilsey's section makes an attempt to salvage the shattered Compson family. To best understand the characters and their positions within the family, the language that echoes across each of their sections must be considered like the fragmented faces of a rubix cube that require shifting to complete the puzzle.

This novel presents language in a way that is best understood by Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of language as a game. The Compson family children struggle to figure out the rules of their family's language game and inevitably fail to fully understand it. While language as a game is notable to understand the novel, Julia Kristeva's extrapolation on language notes the relationship that language games--which are inherently gendered--have to a person's psyche, and thus that this type of language primarily leads to suffering. The Compson family language game,

shaped by the US South's Antebellum past, overwhelms Quentin Compson while he attempts to reconcile his sister's melancholic exile; in doing so, Quentin's stranger within, informed by this gendered language game that pits him against his sister, pushes him to suicide.

I - Wittgenstein & Kristeva - The Compson Family Language Game

Considering the positions that Jason Sr. and Catherine push their children into, Quentin's brother, Jason Jr., best represents the spokesperson for the father's anger and cynicism. He also represents the future that he was robbed of: he is trapped in a life where he must care for the child of Caddie, his older, promiscuous sister, while he is reminded by his mother about how much of a disappointment all of the children have been. In outbursts that come from dialogue with his mother, Jason Jr. reveals, "I never had time to be. I never had time to go to Harvard or drink myself into the ground. I had to work" (181). Not only is Jason Jr. lamenting the things his siblings have done that he was unable to do, but he is reminded of his sibling's mistakes everyday because Miss Quentin, Caddy's daughter, reminds Jason Jr. of his late brother and his sister's disregard for the enforced values of the Antebellum South. But Jason Jr. is not to blame for his own anger: his father and mother have trained him to feel a certain way about his siblings and their actions. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein seeks to better understand language acquisition and how the meaning, the symbols that language points to, begins to ferment when the person is in their earlier years. Moreover, by witnessing actions and language that have been associated with the action or series of actions, he elucidates the power that language has to create, control, and "train" (4). Thus, Jason Jr. has a worldview that stems from the language he acquires from a Compson childhood. His language reservoir limits him to feeling a certain way about his own life in relation to his older siblings' lives.

By noting the various ways in which these three siblings specifically acquire their use of language, the hidden rules or ideals of the family language game emerge. Wittgenstein notes that these rules are not explicitly stated; rather they are observed by those hoping to participate in the dialogue of those already playing (26-7). In this case, the Compson children are observing their parents hoping to pick up on the rules. Wittgenstein argues that this is a process that can fail miserably: “We say that [the game] is played according to such-and-such rules because an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game—like a natural law governing the play.—But how does the observer distinguish in this case between players’ mistakes and correct play?” (27). This question is most prevalent during the earlier moments of childhood when children rapidly acquire language in a variety of ways. Where one child might disregard an idea, an utterance, the other child might feel excluded. In her book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva describes this process as “[l]anguage learning” which “takes place as an attempt to appropriate an oral ‘object’ that slips away and whose hallucination, necessarily deformed, threatens us from the outside” (41). She slightly raises the tone present in Wittgenstein’s argument by noting that the margin of error with language acquisition is not only noticeable but, perhaps, even violent in some senses. Because the Compson children receive various forms and levels of parenting, it is worth noting that their psyches all register differently to their upbringings and affect them each accordingly.

Regrettably, the Compson parents seem to lack an awareness of how they acquired their own use of language. In his article, “Case Study in Social Neurosis: Quentin Compson and the Lost Cause,” Ricky Floyd Dobbs notes that the Compsons are products of the “Lost Cause” because they mimic the discourse of an Antebellum South that requires a level of subservience

and obedience (366). Amongst this discourse, a set of rigid gender roles highlight the epicenters in the Compson family where the children show the greatest difference. Dobbs considers those who pioneer the Lost Cause and, by doing so, explains that these “practitioners endorsed a deferential society based upon white supremacy, social order, and moral purity,” adding how “[t]his social neurosis infected most of those living in the South” (367). The Compson parents, infected by this social neurosis, unconsciously infect their children with the same neurosis.

Wittgenstein uses an analogy to explain this phenomenon in language: “Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses” (8). Although the Compson generations are nuanced in the ways they interact, they all come from the same house that Wittgenstein demonstrates in his investigation of language. The point made with this analogy not only helps delineate the complexities of language, but also notes the connectedness that language has to the language of previous generations.

The Compson family language game, a reiteration of the language from the Antebellum South, seems to rely on rigid gender roles to keep control over women, a phenomenon driven by male anxieties. The post-Civil War South needed to enforce specific roles if they intended to survive in the US. Thomas C. Henthorn describes this need in his article, “A Nation’s Need—Good and Well Trained Mothers”: “Southern progressives premised their policies on the belief that building a great city and redeeming Southern society depended on a patriarchal hierarchy of healthy children, dedicated mothers, and hard-working fathers” (71). As they began to rebuild after the war, public reformers used explicit language that defined these roles.

Although the Compson parents do not explicitly state the roles they expect of their children, they use language that implies the same meaning. The roles that are instilled into their children, most noticeably expressed in Quentin and Jason Jr.'s sections of the novel, help to emulate these Antebellum South gender roles. Unfortunately, the children struggle to fit into these roles accordingly, a struggle that Dobbs observes as dementing their innocence: "Children came into the Faulknerian South as innocents, but from birth until death were forced to contend with cultural pressures and influences which adulterated that innocence" (368). Naturally, all children must comply with cultural pressures and influences, but what if these pressures confuse the child, or the child is incapable of figuring out the role that they are meant to fill? When the language all around them implies a certain behavior, then their language acquisition becomes just as demented as their innocence.

Wittgenstein clarifies that this shift from explicit to implicit language usage is due to an unspoken, or unconscious, human agreement; moreover, he realizes the expectations of participating in a language game: "It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (88). Because the Compson family wishes to exist, and thrive, in the Postbellum South, they adapt their form of life to mimic the values of the Antebellum South, and thus the Compson children do not necessarily need to agree with the opinions of their parents; however, they do need to agree with the language that requires gender-specific private and public life if they want a place in the family and Southern society. Because Jason Jr. is left to pick up the shattered remnants of the Compson family, his anger-induced quarrels with his mother reveal much about the family's past: "I never had time to be. I never had time to go to Harvard or drink myself into the ground. I

had to work. But of course if you want me to follow her around and see what she does, I can quit the store and get a job where I can work at night” (Faulkner 181). Jason Jr., the most compliant of the Compson children, is forced to become the patriarchal figure of his family because his older brother failed while his father drank himself to death, yet Jason Jr. appears angry that the rest of his family failed to accept, and play, the Compson family language game. He resents the fact that he accepted the game, and he alone is left to play it with his mother who feels that her children are simply “burdens.”

With such rigidity in gender roles, the Compson family language game, as an extension of their culture’s language game, tries to hold total control over the future of the Compsons by implanting specific values into their children at young ages. Extending the work that Melanie Klein does on the intimate relationships between people, Julia Kristeva observes the narcissism that can negatively affect these types of relationships in her book *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*: “The behavior of mothers and fathers, overprotective and uneasy, who have chosen the child as a narcissistic artificial limb and keep incorporating that child as a restoring element for the adult psyche intensifies the infant’s tendency toward omnipotence” (61-2). Although Quentin’s and Jason Jr.’s sections narrate their lives in adulthood, not infancy, what their dialogue reveals about their childhood resembles the process that Kristeva discusses. The Compson parents represent an extension of the uneasiness that the Postbellum South is dealing with while they try to restructure. Because of this uneasiness, the children become a narcissistic artificial limb from the parents, as well as the culture of their time. Hoping to hold onto the past while setting up a future for themselves, the Compson parents adjust their behavior in a way that intensifies their children’s anxieties about gender roles in the US. Thus, their language game

indicates an engagement with the Antebellum South's language game. Even though these language games overlap one another, they shift dramatically from explicit to implicit with a disastrous effect for their children.

II - Crisis for Caddy

Although the novel lacks a perspective from Caddy, Quentin's section helps to piece together her relationship with the family language game. In what seems to be a conversation that Quentin is recalling, the Compson parents show signs of worry and distrust for their daughter: "*I will not have my daughter spied on by you or Quentin or anybody no matter what you think she has done At least you agree there is a reason for having her watched I wouldn't have I wouldn't have. I know you wouldn't I didn't mean to speak so sharply but women have no respect for each other for themselves*" (Faulkner 96). Caddy is openly discussed between the Compson parents while Quentin is present. His father is training him by teaching him the gendered rules of the Compson language game: women need to be watched and controlled by men. In addition, this section of the novel suggests that Caddy is already behaving in a way that the parents feel they need to censor. Quentin interjects these two italicized sections, chanting "I wouldn't have I wouldn't have," in a way that resembles a child who does not want to get in trouble from their friends, siblings, or parents. Regardless, Quentin is at a place where he must quickly decide to fully engage in the game with his father, or to risk being excluded. Quentin's conversations with his father help to explain the rules that he attempts to understand and, eventually, abide by: "Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women" (96). To be a man in the Compson family means that Quentin must speak of women as less than men, and thus he needs to treat them in the same way his father treats them. This type of behavior places a strain

on Quentin's relationship with Caddy, for he begins to perpetuate the Compson language game without fully understanding, or agreeing, with it.

Additionally, while Quentin appears to mimic the gendered language game of his family, Caddy acts in a way that reveals her wanting nothing to do with it, placing them directly against each other's growth as individuals. Caddy often asks Quentin to cover for her while she uses the time to explore her sexuality, forcing Quentin to protect his sister from the very people that say she needs to be protected, yet he goes against his parents by covering for her promiscuous activities: "*Got to marry somebody Have there been very many Caddy I dont know too many will you look after Benjy and Father*" (115). Caddy clearly excludes herself from the family which supports the fact that she does not have a section of her own in the novel. In her book *Strangers to Ourselves*, Julia Kristeva clarifies behavior like Caddy's as "[b]earing within oneself like a secret vault, or like a handicapped child—cherished and useless—that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you.... You can become a virtuoso with this new device that moreover gives you a new body, just as artificial and sublimated" (15). Caddy can never forget the ways that her brothers and father talk about her, and women in general, but she can seek ways that liberate her from the language that has only restricted her. In the case of Kristeva's work, Caddy's promiscuity can be seen as the device that gives her a new body. She has no use for the gendered language of her family, but she can never truly forget it.

Caddy seeks a life with agency, a life that she has chosen for herself, while Quentin wants to save her from herself. In hopes of reconciling the family, he continuously tries to reform a level of trust with Caddy because he does not understand that she will never play the Compson family language game. Kristeva argues that there is a notable relationship between a person who

escapes to a life of freedom and their heightened sexual activity; moreover, she describes this relationship as “[t]earing oneself away from family, language, and country in order to settle down elsewhere” which “is a daring action accompanied by sexual frenzy: no more prohibition, everything is possible” in that person’s new world (*Strangers to Ourselves* 30). Caddy’s rejection of the language game leads her to a life of freedom that she is not quite ready to manage. The foundation of language that she acquired as a child goes against her strongest desires; thus, she must leave family, language, and her current region of the country to begin to engage her desires. Hoping to reconcile Caddy with the family before it is too late, Quentin consistently tries to rebuild a form of trust with Caddy. He seems incapable of grasping the fact that Caddy can no longer play the game while she rejects the rules: “I’m not going to tell Father and Mother if that’s what you are getting at Not going to tell not going to oh that that’s what you are talking about is it you understand that I dont give a damn whether you tell or not” (Faulkner 108). Caddy already distances herself from the family because they consistently remind her of her shortcomings which keep her from rejoining the game. Caddy arguably understands the language game better than Quentin, for she recognizes that there are certain things she has done which keep her from rejoining the game.

When she refuses to play the Compson family language game, she not only sacrifices any chance of rejoining the game, but also sacrifices any redeeming value she might have to her family: women in the Compson’s Postbellum South only have value as virtuous women. Caddy’s mother, realizing that Caddy is close to a place of no return, laments to her husband that Caddy puts the family directly at risk with her rejection of the family language game: “We are to sit back with our hands folded while she not only drags your name in the dirt but corrupts the very

air your children breathe” (104). Caroline, clearly unable to control Caddy, wants Jason Sr. to silence her, yet it is this silencing that pushes Caddy to reject the language game in the first place. In this silence Caddy is forced to confront the language game in a way that Kristeva describes as “not the silence of anger that jostles words at the edge of the idea and the mouth; rather, it is a silence that empties the mind and fills the brain with despondency, like the gaze of sorrowful women coiled up in some nonexistent eternity” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 16). To avoid a life of sorrow where she is coiled up and nonexistent, Caddy uses her body as a means to escape. Her family has her trapped in a catch-22, either she can play the family language game and sacrifice her freedom and agency, or she must reject the misogynistic rules of that game and do as she pleases; regardless, both results isolate her. In other words, if she plays the game, she must retreat inward, but if she rejects the game, she becomes exiled. Unfortunately, both of these options lead to her melancholy.

III - Quentin's Stranger Within

Quentin pursues a relationship with Caddy that is impossible for the both of them. He wants to protect her while also trying to raise her, and himself. In addition to this controlling relationship, Quentin realizes his parents' feelings toward Caddy and wants to try and salvage the relationship: “*Done in Mother's mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned* you are confusing sin and morality women dont do that your mother is thinking of morality whether it be sin or not has not occurred to her” (Faulkner 102). Not only are these comments harmful in the way that his father views women, but they also fracture the way that Quentin views women, especially Caddy. Quentin reacts by searching for possible solutions to his parents' view of Caddy as “finished” and “poisoned,” tainting the family's name: “She will not

forget him then all the talk will die away ... maybe I could find a husband for her” (102). Clearly misunderstanding the gravity of his sister’s actions, Quentin is unsure as to how he might save Caddy. He thinks finding a husband for Caddy might fix her title as tainted but does not seem to understand that their parents have already decided to cast her away, to hide her from the judgemental eyes of Postbellum South.

Subsequently, Caddy’s exile becomes the catalyst that begins Quentin’s unraveling; he can never satisfy both Caddy and the Compson family language game because they contradict each other. Quentin’s notion of the family language game stems from his father’s implied use of language. Because his father lacks an awareness of the implications of his gendered language, Quentin’s judgment, meant to save Caddy, just hurts their relationship instead: “I walked upon the belly of my shadow. I could extend my hand beyond it. *Feeling Father behind me beyond the rapsing darkness of summer and August the street lamps* Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women” (97). Quentin believes he must protect women, as implied by his father, but this patriarchal notion looms over Quentin like a shadow more overbearing than the darkness of summer and August. Perhaps the darkness Quentin describes stems from his discontent with viewing women in the possessive case. His shadow is dysmorphic, surrounding Quentin in a way that he cannot even describe. Thus, instead of describing the shadow that he walks in, he depicts it as an overbearing force that guides his every step. Quentin’s notion of the family language game might have been helpful at one point; however, because of this language game, Quentin seeps further into a state of despair that Kristeva describes as a place where “[h]e shall not encounter the bright and fragile amatory idealization; on the contrary, [h]e shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the *loss* of that

essential other. The shadow of despair” (*Black Sun* 5). Quentin’s shadow, arguably, represents the rules of the Compson family language game; thus, when Caddy is no longer allowed to play the game, Quentin begins to dissociate from himself.

Quentin has been trained to look at women like property that needs protecting which helps explain the way he interacts with Caddy. Moreso, their parents treat Caddy as though her existence is a shame on the entire family, and instruct Quentin that he needs to keep this stain from completely tarnishing the family name. Quentin pursues a middle ground between his father’s disgust for Caddy and his own confusion with her. Because the two work in opposition, Caddy seems to provide a solution for Quentin by pleading with Quentin to submit to the rules of the family language game, so at least he might have a future. Thus, their father’s view of Caddy is reenforced by her as well: “*Say it to Father will you I will am my fathers Progenitive I invented him created I him Say it to him it will not be for he will say I was not and then you and I since philoprogenitive*” (122). Her comments try to convince Quentin of the gendered-reality that they live in. Caddy seems to understand the game, and thus she must reject it if she wants a sliver of freedom. By making a case for Quentin to accept the Compson family language game and live into the duty their parents require, she hopes he might have a better future, a future that was never offered to her because she is a woman.

Just as Caddy’s words deeply affect Quentin, the words that Quentin keeps hearing from childhood to his later years of adolescence also affect him, becoming symbols that he holds onto almost as much as the words themselves. These words help identify Quentin’s view of the world and his view of himself. Unclear as to which thoughts he hears from dialogue with his siblings and which ones are from his actual parents’ mouths, Quentin struggles to decipher the mixed

messages he receives from Mother and Father. For instance, Quentin's section repeatedly echoes with the recitation of "*Harvard my Harvard boy Harvard Harvard*" (92). Harvard, literally the name of a college, carries a great deal of subtext for the family and now Quentin as well.

Harvard, a symbol of hope for the declining South, provides the means for the Compsons to still exist in the world of the US North. Quentin begins to no longer see himself as Quentin, but as "Harvard boy" instead. In essence his Mother's constant reminder about the importance of Harvard minimizes Quentin as an individual. As a result, Quentin feels paralyzed, trapped in a game that consistently belittles and isolates him. Wittgenstein, fully aware of the complexities of language, suggests that "teaching is not meant to apply to anything but the examples given [are] different from that which '*points beyond*' them" (83). In other words, he argues that language sometimes errs in explaining the subtext, or potential subtext, that accompanies language.

Mother might understand the symbol that Harvard is to a family of Antebellum South, but she is oblivious to the weight that this symbol carries for Quentin.

And, to add even more weight to this symbol, Caroline indicates that Quentin's brother, Benjy, has literally been cut out of the Compson's future: his portion of the family's land is sold for Quentin to fully live out his life as a Harvard boy. Her careless use of language poisons Quentin's ability to think independently: "Going to Harvard. We have sold Benjy's *He lay on the ground under the window, bellowing We have sold Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard* a brother to you. Your little brother" (94). Benjy appears to have heard the same remark that Quentin hears causing him to "bellow" as a result. The symbol of Harvard, juxtaposed with Quentin's role as a sibling adds another point of tension for Quentin because he is not the only one affected by the word and symbol. Benjy is also affected. With the bellowing of his brother

who no longer has a future and his mother's repetitive declaration of Harvard, Quentin suffocates himself between these two burdens.

As Quentin slips further into this state of despair, he thinks about past memories that might bring him a sense of peace. The Compson family language game isolates him from his siblings, so it would make sense that he wants to think about times where he was not isolated from them. For instance, he recollects, "*Getting the odor of honeysuckle all mixed She would have told me not to let me sit there on the steps hearing her door twilight slamming hearing Benjy still crying Supper she would have to come down then getting honeysuckle all mixed up in it*" (129). These memories shatter his reality into a world that just confuses and depresses him. He feels overwhelmed by the words around him, so he resorts to what Kristeva describes as "flee[ing] the slimy poison of depression For in the intervening period of nostalgia, saturated with fragrances and sounds to which he no longer belongs and which, because of that, wound him less than those of the here and now" (*Strangers to Ourselves* 10). He escapes to sounds and smells that he holds onto--anchors in a life over which he has little control over. The fragrances of his past, honeysuckle, and the sounds of his past and present, his brother's crying, offer simple things to reflect on that cannot harm them. Since he has left these things in the past, they cannot physically harm him like the thoughts of his present, so they offer a moment of silence to be at peace with the nostalgia. Unfortunately, this false sense of peace is just a mask for Quentin, and it hides the overwhelming feeling of depression that he wants to leave in the past like his memories.

Nevertheless, Quentin's confusion with his inability to fully accept the Compson family language game overwhelms him: his language begins to devolve and fragments the meaning

around him. Moreover, he seemingly tries to escape from the conscious pressures of the Compson family language; this leaves him to deconstruct the thoughts of his subconscious. Perhaps he wants to trace his language back to the meaning, to deconstruct the meaning around him. Kristeva distinguishes the importance of understanding language because “[f]or the speaking being life is a meaningful life Hence if the meaning of life is lost, life can easily be lost: when meaning shatters, life no longer matters” (*Black Sun* 6). Quentin is a speaking being, and thus his inability to figure out the meaning of his life, let alone the meaning of the Compson family language game, pushes him further into anguish. The symbols and language surrounding him continue to shatter into fragments which pushes him into a place where his life no longer matters. Quentin exhibits behavior that Kristeva describes as someone reaching abjection: “[T]he borderline patient is often abstract, made up of stereotypes that are bound to seem cultured; he aims at precision, indulges in self-examination, in meticulous comprehension, which easily brings to mind obsessional discourse” (*Powers of Horror* 49). Quentin is losing track of meaning, so he turns inward to his psyche and obsesses over the language that he has acquired thus far in his life. His narrative blends the concrete observations from his senses and the abstract symbols behind these sensory memories.

As these symbols begin to affect his mental health further, Quentin’s material reality deteriorates even more. His conscious thoughts become overwhelmed by his subconscious; for example, he depicts, “I could not see the bottom, but I could see a long way into the motion of the water before the eye gave out, and then I saw a shadow hanging like a fat arrow stemming into the current” (116). The bottom of the water, the water that he drowns himself in, reflects back at him, but he does not describe the shadow as his own; rather, he sees an arrow pointing to

the current. In this depressive state of mind, Kristeva distinguishes that he “shall not encounter the bright and fragile amatory idealization; on the contrary, [he] shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the *loss* of that essential other. The shadow of despair” (*Black Sun* 5). Might this shadow be a reflection of the loss he feels for himself and the meaning of everything around him? His material reality is too difficult for him to bear; thus, he loses a piece of himself as the voice of his subconscious thoughts, the foreigner, within him comes closer to the surface of his reality. His sense of self continues to splinter, falling further away from the symbols that have caused him so much confusion. Looking at the water seemingly triggers a flickering thought in Quentin’s mind, so he thinks that the water is a way to escape the dread that has been passed down to him from his sister’s exile and his family’s language game.

When these two entities (the foreigner and the rules of the Compson family language game) clash, Quentin begins to unravel. Neither can exist together at the same time because the Compson family language game is shaped by the “outside world,” and the foreigner emerges as an “alien *double*, uncanny and demoniacal”; this foreigner unravels the meaning of the outside world and corrupts it (*Strangers to Ourselves* 183). Thus, they collapse onto each other, leaving him to address his subconscious thoughts. As the meaning continues to slip away from Quentin, the weight of these two entities overwhelm his ability to think. Left alone with his thoughts, Quentin is experiencing what Kristeva compares to an abyss-like conversation that someone like Quentin has with his own thoughts:

Also strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me—I do not even perceive him, perhaps he crushes me because I negate him.

Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel “lost,” “indistinct,” “hazy.”

(Strangers to Ourselves 187)

Quentin feels separated not only from those around him but also from himself. As he further explores his subconscious to try and salvage any meaning that he has already lost, Quentin begins to lose himself to the foreigner within, the stranger that he repressed since childhood and hoped to forget. And, as his narrative continues to develop, all of his memories flood back at once via an overload of words and symbols from his past, so his language becomes more disrupted, showcasing his overwhelming sense of depression and despair.

Furthermore, he feels nostalgic for a life where he can just exist as a sibling, before he was a Harvard boy, and so these feelings ripple through his final moments alive and can only keep his depression at bay momentarily. But, nostalgia is a double edged sword that eludes to a happier place which does not exist anymore. Thus, he slips from his nostalgic sensory memories back into his depressive state; for instance, he distorts the smell of “honeysuckle [which] was the saddest odor of all” and adds, “This was where I saw the river for the last time this morning, about here. I could feel water beyond the twilight, smell. When it bloomed in the spring and it rained the smell was everywhere” (Faulkner 169). Juxtaposing the river where he drowns himself with the sensory experience of his past reveals the mental strife that is causing him to self-destruct. He seems to try and remove himself from everything that overwhelms him, so he turns to what Kristeva discerns as “such an elimination of the strange could lead to an elimination of the psyche, leaving, at the cost of mental impoverishment, the way open to acting

out, including paranoia and murder” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 190). Although Quentin seems less paranoid and simply exhausted, he seeks murder, suicide in his case, to absolve his mental impoverishment. His acting out presents itself in the most extreme form of violence.

Even though his mind seems to deteriorate into a state beyond repair, Quentin has moments of clarity that represent his conscious mind fighting to understand his foreigner within. But, what does this moment of clarity do for him? Nothing. This clarity only helps him express the war taking place in his psyche:

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

At this point in Quentin’s narrative, he feels paralyzed, neither asleep, nor awake. In these moments of clarity, Quentin expresses the true suffering that he feels at every moment. Naturally, he might want to escape sensory experience from his past to fight for some sense of comfort in nostalgia. What options does he have? His own thoughts are like shadows that are taking visible form, antic and perverse, mocking his very own existence. What should he do when his state of depression makes him want to kill himself? How can he reconcile these feelings? He has lost meaning, and thus lost a will to live.

Quentin searches for other experiences that might bring him some answers to these painful questions. Further revealing past experiences that may have contributed to his current state of devolution, Quentin says, “[I] had no sister but Benjamin Benjamin the child of my sorrowful if I’d just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother” (172). As he thinks back to his mother, he is reminded of a comment that she makes about her sorrow for having a son like Benjamin, a son that is somehow punishment to her because of his mental capacity. This moment of disarray slips into the consciousness of his stranger that is “the foreigner [who] has lost his mother”; in addition, he feels that “one has not much noticed that this cold orphan, whose indifference can become criminal, is a fanatic of absence. He is a devotee of solitude, even in the midst of a crowd, because he is faithful to a shadow: bewitching secret, parental ideal, inaccessible ambition” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 5). Quentin falls prey to his circumstances and the foreigner within his mind that was created by the Compson family language game. They, pushing him to inaccessible ambition, create a world where he can never truly understand the rules of the language game; in extension, he can never understand himself.

He envisions a new reality in the water where he can escape symbols that drive him into a state of paralysis. Still holding onto the ideal world where he and Caddy can live freely, Quentin brings her into his recreated reality of the river: “*If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me...and the horror beyond the clean flame Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame*” (117). The “hell beyond” reveals the extreme turmoil Quentin feels in his material reality. Extending this comment even further, Quentin describes a horror that is walled by a clean flame; subsequently, his material reality must be the horror while the clean flame is the hell he

wishes to escape to. Quentin's thought process, although chilling, feels like his only option to find reconciliation with his circumstances, and Kristeva clarifies that "[i]n such a case, suicide is not a disguised act of war but a merging with sadness and, beyond it, with that impossible love, never reached, always elsewhere, such as the promises of nothingness, of death" (*Black Sun* 12-3). Suicide often seems to warrant censure, yet Quentin's suicide attempts to simply reconcile his feelings of sadness, despair, and loss.

Quentin has been wrestling with the symbols of his past and present, fighting for a moment of peace, so, naturally, he returns to the corridor of his childhood in his last thoughts alive. In this envisioned corridor of home, he reflects, "Then the curtains breathing out of the dark upon my face, leaving the breathing upon my face. A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peaceullest word. Peaceullest words" (174). Peace to Quentin is synonymous with death. His suicide--in a quarter hour yet when he is no longer breathing--is the peaceful state of mind where Quentin will no longer be bombarded by voices from the foreigner, nor from Mother and Father's ideological language games. Kristeva distinguishes the pain and sorrow in a depressed person in that Quentin's fragmented final words are trying to "address an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief that at times ... lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions, and even life itself" (*Black Sun* 3). His desire to leave the "whispering battalions in the silence" exceeds any desire he has to live. Quentin just wanted to be a brother to Caddy. Not a Harvard boy. Not a man who got a future at the expense of his siblings. The Compson family language has taken root in the heart of all the Compson children, and it inevitably causes the ruin of their prized son—Quentin.

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