TIME, MAN AND SOCIETY

IN SELECTED FAULKNER NOVELS

TIME, MAN, SOCIETY
AND
"ODE ON A GRECIAN URN"
IN WILLIAM FAULKNER'S
AS I LAY DYING, GO DOWN, MOSES, AND LIGHT IN AUGUST

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As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August

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Abstract

Much has been written on the references to John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" in William Faulkner's novels. Critical analysis has dealt mainly with the utilization of images and symbols from the "Ode" in Faulkner's fiction without any sense of a thematic pattern connecting each fictional work. This thesis also examines Keatsian references in Faulkner's novels, in particular, As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August. However, the approach of this thesis is to regard these three novels as interrelated in that they comprise a multi-faceted meditation on John Keats' "Ode". This meditation involves abstracting imagistic, symbolic and thematic references from Keats' poem in an examination of the theme of artistic and temporal transcendence. Faulkner's references are inverted with a wry, darkly ironic tone that questions the function and status of romantic idealism in the modern world. Together, As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August comprise a treatise on the spiritual degeneration of today's society and comments on the direction in which society is travelling.

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Chapter 1: The Faces of Time

The relationship between time and self is a thematic issue that engrosses William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August. This relationship is the fulcrum on which these novels turn in their exploration of the human condition. The purpose of this exploration is the search for meaning in action and thought. As meaning is predicated on temporal constructs, this search must include the examination of the subjective definition of past, present and future time and the relationship of such definitions to the self. An examination of the impact society has on man's definition of time is also called for because it is society which produces constructs and norms and evolves language to communicate these constructs.

William Faulkner wrote, in "Verse Old and Nascent: A Pilgrimmage", published in 1925, that "Time changes us, but Time's self does not change" (131). Yet, what exactly is the nature of "Time's self"? In discussing the temporal themes in William Faulkner's stories, a bewildering assortment of terms are used that speak of the perplexity this question raises. For example, Wesley A. Kort, in Modern Fiction and Human Time: A Study in Narrative and Belief, identifies three types of time in Faulkner's works, "melodic", "rhythmic" and "social" time. Kort writes that melodic time is the movement "of characters and narrators toward resolution of some internal uncertainty", rhythmic time as "The passing of days and of seasons, the processes of growth and decay, and the association of people with natural cycles and animal life" and the meaning of social time as arising from the relationship "between differing kinds of people and diverse human interests within society" (93-94). Olga Vickery, however, in The Novels of William

Faulkner speaks of "mechanical linear time" and "natural time" (255). Vickery's definition of "natural time" as time that is "actualized in the steady progression of the seasons" is similar to Kort's definition of rhythmic time. Vickery's "mechanical linear time", symbolized by "the whole apparatus invented for telling time, the clocks and the calendars" is closely linked to Kort's "social time" as the utilization of units of temporal measurement is a socially agreed upon construct (Vickery 255-256). The similarity in the definition of temporal terms employed by Vickery and Kort is an example of what I would argue is a similarity in a significant portion of the terms used to address temporal themes in Faulkner's work. These terms differ in name only because they are attempting to delineate the common concern of identifying types of time continuums and locating an individual's relationship to these time continuums. A comparison of these types of time continuums indicates that these critical approaches are based on delineating time as either subjective or objective. Objective time is a time that, as Vickery explains, "continues weaving its patterns regardless of the presence or absence of any one person" (255). Objective time can also be called linear time as it is denoted by the continuous progression from one discreet stage to the next and defined by objective measurements agreed upon by society. These objective measurements imply "a uniform series or linear order in terms of cause and effect" (Mendilow 21). Subjective time, however, "is dependent for its very existence on the individual's awareness of it. Since time manifests itself through events and change, it is identical with man's experience" (Vickery 255).

A.A. Mendilow, in Time and the Novel, writes that subjective time is measured by a "private clock that measures time by values and intensity" (31). Time is thus defined by perception and, as Hans Meyerhoff in Time in Literature writes,

Time as experienced exhibits the quality of subjective

> relativity, or is characterized by some sort of unequal distribution, irregularity, and nonuniformity in the personal metric of time. This quality differs radically from the regular, uniform, quantitative units characteristic of an objective metric (13).

Hence, as perception changes so do the temporal values employed in perception. Mendilow further points out that remembrance "is not a mechanical reconstruction or recapitulation of the past as it was but is rather an emotionally charged interpretation of events which changes and shifts as the interpreting self grows in time and is altered by it" (31-32). Hence, subjective time emphasizes the significance of memory, which is composed of past remembrances and the interpretation of these events, because "Things remembered are fused and confused with things feared and hoped for. Wishes and fantasies may not only be remembered as facts, but the facts remembered are constantly modified, reinterpreted, and lived in the light of present exigencies, past fears and future hopes" (Meyerhoff 21-22). Meyerhoff further points out that,

> ...the inner world of experience and memory exhibits a structure which is causally determined by significant associations in the outside world. To render this peculiar structure, therefore, requires a symbolism or imagery in which the different modalities of time, past present, and future, are not serially, progressively, and uniformly ordered but are always inextricably and dynamically associated and mixed up with each other (Meyerhoff 23-24).

Past, present and future are not, then, discrete entities as in linear time but are interchangeable. If "the facts remembered are constantly modified, reinterpreted and lived in the light of present exigencies, past fears and future hopes", then I would argue that subjective time is also cyclical in nature for time would revolve around the interpretation and reinterpretation of a significant event (Meyerhoff 22).

Because subjective time is dependent on perception, concepts of self necessarily become intertwined with the perception of how the self is located in time. And because memory is constructed from the perception and interpretation of significant events, these events become interchangeable with a perception of the self so that the self impinges on the interpretation of the event and the event impinges on the self. The interaction of self with subjective time is thus qualitatively different from the manner in which the self is positioned with the discrete, incremental units of linear time imposed and sanctioned by society. As opposed to subjective time where man is an actor and not a passive spectator, Olga Vickery points out that "it is through logic applied introspectively that man arrives at his concept of linear time, for with respect to his own fixed position as spectator, events seem to recede in a regular temporal sequence" (256).

How then can the self, which is inextricably bound with the perception of time, be reconciled with the social construct that is linear time? Faulkner's fiction attempts to portray this fundamental problem by utilizing John Keats' poem, "Ode On a Grecian Urn", as the springboard for a temporal meditation. Faulkner's interest in Keats is apparent in his essay, "Verse Old and Nascent: A Pilgrimage", where he writes,

> I read "Thou still unravished bride of quietness" and found a still water withal strong and potent, quiet with its own strength , and satisfying as bread. That beautiful awareness, so sure of its own power that it is not necessary to create the illusion of force by frenzy and motion. Take the odes to a Nightingale, to a Grecian Urn, "Music to hear," etc.; here is the spiritual beauty which the moderns strive vainly for with trickery, and yet beneath it one knows are entrails...Is there nowhere among us a Keats in embryo, someone who will tune his lute to the beauty of the world? (130-131).

Faulkner's essay, which lauds the "still water withal strong and potent, quiet with its own strength" and the "power that is not necessary to create the illusion of force by frenzy and motion" in Keats' poetry also hints at his interest in a timeless beauty that is beyond change or motion (Faulkner 130). Faulkner's interest in this theme is underlined in the Paris Review interview with Jean Stein where, as Hilayne Cavanaugh points out in "Faulkner, Stasis and Keats's "Ode On A Grecian Urn"", he delineates his aesthetic and artistic credo. For example, Faulkner points out that,

> The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that 100 years later when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life. Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move. This is the artist's way of saying "Kilroy was here" on the wall of the final and irrevocable oblivion through which he someday must pass (Cavanaugh 2).

It is Faulkner's recognition of this artistic transcendence that provides one of the thematic links between his work and Keats' poem.

In his work, Time and Literature, Meyerhoff addresses the temporal qualities of Art. Meyerhoff writes that,

> The work of art captures essences in experience and is a permanent, timeless source for the recapture of these essences. Thus the art object may be said to endure without a date, as the qualities incorporated in it endure, and the selves reconstructed through and in the work of art have a timeless quality (Meyerhoff 57).

I would add that, in the construction of a work of art, the artist, in projecting his self onto his creation, achieves a transcendence of self. This artistic transcendence of the self is reflected in the transcendence of the self gained in cyclical time. Because cyclical time

is defined by the interpretation and reinterpretation of an event, the investiture of such significance in this "single unique event" implies that this event is lifted from its place in the past and acquires a timeless aspect. This omnipresent event then shapes the present and the future. Therefore,

> The act of recollection itself is timeless in that it seems to have no date or temporal index attached to it. It is a permanent or timeless possibility. The recollection may burst in consciousness at any time or place, which gives it the quality of being beyond time and place (Meyerhoff 54-55).

Faulkner juxtaposes these ideals of artistic and temporal transcendence by utilizing thematic, imagistic and symbolic references to Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn". It is the purpose of this thesis to study this juxtaposition in the light of Keats' poem in three of Faulkner's most important novels, As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August.

Chapter 2:

As I Lay Dying: A Meditation On Time, Timelessness, and "Ode On A Grecian Urn"

William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying is a meditation on John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn". The novel bases its thematic development on the themes of eternity, transcendence, stasis and language contained in the poem. Implicitly and explicitly, the novel abstracts themes and images from the poem. However, as the novel explores the tri-dimensional relationship between man, society and the ideal of transcendence, these themes are rendered in an ironic, darkly humorous manner that questions the existence of such artistic ideals in the modern world.

John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" is thematically indicative of an object that is in stasis. The urn is a "still unravished bride of quietness", a bride caught between the marriage ceremony and consummation and the "foster-child of silence and slow time" (1-2). The friezes on the urn echo this theme as they depict and arrest a moment in action. For example, the frieze of the wooing lover captures the lover in an endless moment of request. Keats writes, "Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave / Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare; / Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss" (15-17). The urn is also transcendent in that it captures the essence and the height of intent and emotion. Keats writes,"More happy love! more happy, happy love! / For ever warm and still to be enjoyed; / For ever panting, and for ever young" (25-27). Hence the frieze of the wooing lover not only captures a moment of request but the height of passionate longing. The urn symbolizes, then, an artistic transcendence of the eroding passage of time.

Paul Melebeck, in "Just a Shape To Fill A Lack: Receptacles in Faulkner's As I Lay Dying", argues that perceptions in As I Lay Dying are portrayed as either concretized through "receptacles" or captured in images of frozen movement. For example, Melebeck points out that Darl's remembrance of how he loved drinking from the water bucket at night paints an image where "reality is frozen for a moment, indeed the bucket even seems to hold the whole cosmos for a few seconds" (449). Darl's monologue describes how he loved drinking from the water bucket at night because "It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two before I drank" (9). The utilization of an image of stasis is repeated in Darl's view of Jewel and his attempt to control his horse. Darl sees the unfolding scene before him as "two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun" (11). In this tableau of stillness, Darl senses that initially there is dazzling motion where "Jewel is enclosed by a glittering maze of hooves as by an illusion of wings; among them, beneath the upreared chest, he moves with the flashing limberness of a snake" (11). Then, this motion is suddenly frozen and man and horse are "rigid, motionless, terrific" (11). I would also point out that Melebeck's argument can be extended to uphold my assertion that the "receptacle" imagery in As I Lay Dying implicitly refers to the image of the urn itself in John Keats' "Ode". My position is reinforced by Hilayne E. Cavanaugh, in her Ph.D. thesis, "Faulkner, Stasis And Keats's "Ode On A Grecian Urn", where she writes that "What doubtless appealed to Faulkner in Keats's Ode was partly, therefore, that he saw in it the poet's ability to give the impression of life halted in the middle of motion, the suggestion of beauty held and arrested for the purpose of contemplation and immortality" (3). The "appeal" that Cavanaugh speaks of is apparent in William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying which contains

implicit references to John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" in its images of frozen movement. Hence, Darl's perception of these friezes represent, like the friezes on the Grecian urn, a transcendent timelessness that arises from the capturing of a heightened emotional, sensual, and physical experience where there is a shedding of identity, a feeling of unity. Thus, Darl perceives Jewel flowing "upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in midair shaped to the horse" (11).

Paul Melebeck argues that As I lay Dying is full of images of ""receptacles", meaning things that contain other things, empty shapes that get filled" (447). This imagery is painfully evident in Addie's monologue where she enunciates her awareness of the discrepancy between meaning and intent and the words used to describe meaning. For example, she thinks "that words are no good; that words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say" (157). The words that society uses are, to Addie, receptacles of meaninglessness and not of meaning. Melebeck points out that,

> ...Addie sees reality as a slow-moving continuum ('cold molasses') which fills with meaning the words man has invented to describe it. But these words have absolutely no significance by themselves. You use them for want of something better. Therefore the reality of a person's existence cannot be truly encompassed by these words (447).

I would also assert that the utilization of "receptacle" imagery to promote the theme of meaningless language can be extended to underline As I Lay Dying's meditation on Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn". Addie's use of "jar" imagery not only is imagistically but thematically reminiscent of "Ode On A Grecian Urn". For example, she thinks,

> ...Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquify and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the

> darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and
> motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life
> like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I
> had forgotten the name of the jar (159).

Just as the "Ode" presents the urn as a symbol of action, intent and emotion held in stasis, As I Lay Dying presents the language of society as actualizing and fixing conceptions, perceptions and intent in the flow of time. However, if the subjective perception of time holds a non-linear quality in that past, present and future seem to co-exist simultaneously, then language must be inadequate in the conveyance of perception. Thus "Ode On A Grecian Urn" also implies that, since thought is temporily malleable and permeates the flow of time, the very language used to express the act of perceiving the urn is antithetical to the urn itself which is timeless. The speaker of the "Ode", in lyrically acknowledging the timeless beauty of the urn, seeks to achieve an artistic transcendence. However, the speaker realizes the difficulty in this venture and withdraws from the urn, calling it a "Cold Pastoral!" (45). Mendilow, who in his book Time and the Novel, writes on the thematic exploration of time in literature, points out that "Words, by congealing the fluid processes of thought, express something that is different and must be untrue, no matter how acceptable conventionally they may be to others" (Mendilow 147). I would argue that Mendilow's postulation on the nature of language can be applied to Addie's perception of language as confining and constrictive. Hence it is that Addie that feels herself to be not only outside of the linear temporal constructs recognized by society, but to be outside of language as well. So she thinks "My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love what you will, outside the circle" (158).

Henri Bergson, in Time and Free Will, also recognizes the discrepancy between language and its ability to communicate that which exists in a temporal space that knows no limits or boundaries. For example, Bergson writes that,

> The feeling itself is a being which lives and develops and is therefore constantly changing; otherwise how could it gradually lead us to form a resolution? Our resolution would be immediately taken. But it lives because the duration in which it develops is a duration whose moments permeate one another. By separating these moments from each other, by spreading out time in space, we have caused this feeling to lose its life and its colour. Hence, we are now standing before our own shadow: we believe that we have analyzed our feeling, while we have really replaced it by a juxtaposition of lifeless states which can be translated into words and each of which constitutes the common element, the impersonal residues, of the impressions felt in a given case by the whole of society (132-133).

Bergson's theory can be applied to As I Lay Dying's extraction of the theme of language and time from the "Ode". By compressing certain chosen meanings into units that society calls language and imposing these units onto individuals, a conflict is created between the reality that the self perceives and the reality that society deems significant and acceptable. Thus it is that Addie thinks, "I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to other" (166).

In the lines "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!", the speaker in the "Ode" laments that the urn cannot answer his questions (44-45). However, it is appropriate that the urn cannot speak and that it remain a "silent form" for language cannot capture that which is temporily transcendent. The

significance of the urn's silence is amplified in Addie's ability to divine meaning that is beyond speech. For example, she thinks,

> 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 people's lacks (160).

What is apparent then in juxtaposing the urn to Addie is that their existence transcends the temporal limitations of language.

The construction of As I Lay Dying is also reminiscent of Keats' "Ode". As I Lay Dying is composed of differing viewpoints centering around the viewpoint of the already dead Addie. This construction recalls the image of the speaker in the "Ode" walking around the ageless urn, attempting to decipher each frieze in turn. However, As I Lay Dying inverts the "Ode"'s tone of idealistic admiration because, when contrasted and compared together, each viewpoint underscores the great gap of misunderstanding between discrete perceptual realities. For example, Cora, watching Darl as he looks at the dying Addie, interprets his action as one of love. She thinks,

> He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again
> and His Mercy. I saw that with Jewel she had just been pretending,
> but that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the
> true love was (22).

However, in the following chapter where Dewey Dell's viewpoint is represented, it is revealed that Darl was watching his mother to assess when she would die and the possibility of hauling another "load" in the interval. The juxtaposition of all these realities indicate that they can never adequately capture the essence of a particular reality or truth. Hence it is that Addie's voice resounds in the center of the novel, alone and scornful. She is like the urn with many eyes imposing different interpretations or friezes

onto her. These interpretations, which fall far short of what Addie perceives to be true, underline her isolation, much as the urn is depicted as a solitary object to be interpreted.

Olga Vickery, writing on the theme of time in The Novels of William Faulkner, asserts that there is a type of time that is "that vital impulse behind all things...it is related to the land and actualized in the steady progression of the seasons, it may be called natural time" (255-256). I would argue that natural time bears similarities to the cyclical nature of the subjective perception of time for Vickery, herself, points out that the movement of natural time "is cyclical and because it appears as a continuous process, all time exists in any one moment of it" (Vickery 256). Keats' poem contains a melding of natural and subjective time for, as the spectator's eye traverses the circular shape of the urn, past, present and future exist at the same point of reference. As well, its friezes depicts the cycles of creation and destruction that Olga Vickery argues defines natural time. For example, creation is inherent in the promise of love, passion and desire fulfilled in the frieze of the wooing lovers. The urn also depicts destruction in the frieze of an animal being led to a sacrificial slaughter. For example, Keats writes, "To what green altar, O mysterious priest, / Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies, / And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?" (32-34). Yet, even in this image of sacrificial death, there is contained the promise of creation. Hence, the altar is "green", a colour evocative of the fertility of spring, and the heifer is laden with "garlands" of flowers, symbols of reproduction and fertility.

"Ode On A Grecian Urn"'s juxtaposition of natural time with subjective time is underscored in As I Lay Dying's characterizations, in particular the character of Addie. Addie feels divorced from the framework of linear time and language specified by society and is, instead, attenuated to an existence of natural time. Hence, Addie feels

herself to be a part of the ""vital impulse" that is related to the land and actualized in the steady progression of the seasons" (Vickery 255). For example, as an unmarried schoolteacher, Addie would find release in going to the spring because "It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth" (155). Attuned as she is to the cyclical nature of creation and destruction, her stultifying life is all the more unbearable. So, Addie's monologue continues with "In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness" (156). Hence, I would disagree with Wesley A. Kort, who writes about the existence of polyphonic time in Faulkner's novels in Modern Fiction and Human Time. Kort argues that "While the Bundrens may appear to have a close contact with nature, they live separated from it. Addie's attitude toward language...all reveal life not in rapport with but distant from and opposed to nature" (100). Addie's "attitude" towards language, far from placing her in opposition to nature, aligns her sympathies with it. I would point out that Kort is confusing natural and subjective time with social time. Language is a social construct and its function of fixing perception is opposed to the cyclical temporal rhythms of nature and perception. Without any links of comprehension and communication between Addie and her family, neighbours and society, all Addie can be connected to is natural time and so she uses it as an explanation for her adultery. For example, Addie thinks, "I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land" (161). And just as in natural time there is no past and future, beginning and ending, so too does Addie believe, once her affair with Whitfield is over, that "but for me it was not over; I mean, over in the sense of

beginning and ending, because to me there was no beginning nor ending to anything then" (162). Furthermore, Kort argues that "the journey to bury Addie in Jefferson rather than in the countryside is a fulfillment of her longstanding rejection of rural life" (10). I would argue that this explanation is simplistic and erroneous for Addie's deathbed wish is more a reflection of her alienation from her family and a society which insists on discrete units of time and a language that she finds meaningless. Hence, her realization that "I knew that father had been right" in his belief that "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" is indicative of her belief that there is no difference between life and death, creation and destruction, past and future (155,159).

James A. Snead writes, in Figures of Division, that Addie exemplifies lost selfhood and that she finds "freedom in places that designate loss, places outside conventional language and even outside life" (48). I would assert that Addie exemplifies not so much "lost selfhood" as a selfhood that exists beyond the definitions of language, family and time that are espoused by society. The inclusion of her voice in the middle of the text, even though she is already dead, and Darl's perception of her coffin as imbued with Addie's life emphasizes the timelessness inherent in Addie's character. For example, as the coffin is being loaded in the wagon, Darl thinks, "For an instant, it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling" (87). Hence, it is as if Addie has transcended death and is still alive.

James A. Snead also argues that Darl, like Addie, exemplifies lost selfhood. Snead writes that "Darl wants to be "emptied" of the "I am"; he seeks the viewpoint of an

other, or even of all others" (Snead 48). For example, Darl thinks,

> And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not (72).

I would also assert that Darl's tenuous concept of self is also manifested in his conceptions of time and language. His distance from a socially approved linear time frame and closeness to a cyclical one is apparent in his awareness, similar to Addie's, of the land. For example, Dewey Dell senses that Darl's eyes are "full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land" (23). And just as Addie is alienated from language that freezes conceptions and perceptions in time, Darl too intuitively senses a reality unconstrained by language. For example, Darl, believing he can communicate with Cash nonverbally, thinks,

> he and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame (128).

Darl's sense of cyclical time is also readily apparent when he views the position of his self in space in terms of the flow of time. For example, as he travels towards Jefferson, he thinks, "We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferent of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it" (95). Not only does he view his physical and spiritual self in a temporal light but he also evaluates his relationship with his family in this light. Hence, when the Bundrens reach the river, Darl thinks, "It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality. It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line,

now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between" (132). Hence, alienated as he is from socially approved views of space and time, Darl is able to envisage Addie's death, even though he has left to transport a "load", just as Addie's voice appears in the middle of the novel even though she is already dead.

Unlike Addie, however, Darl is not able to attain a selfhood that is able to exist divorced from the constraints of society. Instead of utterly rejecting society as Addie does, Darl attempts to impose his own viewpoint on society. Therefore, when he attempts to act on his own interpretation of reality, he is unable to reach a reconciliation with socially approved views. For example, when he tries to set fire to Addie's corpse, society labels him as insane. Cash's realization that Darl's action may be valid but is in conflict with society underscores Darl's isolation. Cash thinks,

> But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way (216).

Darl cannot exist in his society. His only refuge is in what society perceives of as insanity, which is really a state of perception that is not in tempo with accepted social reality.

The character of Darl also stands as a marker for the novel's ironic view of romantic ideals such as truth and courage. Darl's attempt to dispose of his mother's corpse in a "clean" manner underscores the grotesquely heroic efforts of the Bundren family to transport Addie's corpse to Jefferson. As well, the employment of Keatsian

imagery to delineate Darl's anomic sense of time, self and society further emphasizes the absurdity of the Bundrens' heroic efforts. For example, as Darl watches Gillespie try to prevent Jewel from rescuing Addie's coffin, he sees the scene as "like two figures in a Greek frieze, isolated out of all reality by the red glare" (204). Such Keatsian imagery, juxtaposed with the Byzantine motives of the Bundrens, demarcates the novel's declaration that ideals of Beauty, Truth and Transcendence must undergo a continuous assault. If transcendence is to be achieved, the only choice is to either follow Addie's example of complete isolation and rejection of society or be labelled insane.

William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying exemplifies the employment of John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" as a basis for a meditation on time, society, and man. Themes of time, eternity and transcendence contained in Keats' poem resound through this novel, informing its characterization and thematic development. As I Lay Dying, by presenting differing points of view, depicts the agonizing loneliness and frustration that arises in trying to find a resolution between one's perceptions and that of society's. Such loneliness strikes at the very root of existence, exploding the anchoring ties of filial and conjugal relationships. The depiction of this lonely frustration, coupled with the novel's grotesquely ironic inversion of pastoral elements, is indicative that the hallowed temples of Beauty and Truth are under assault. As I Lay Dying sets the thematic stage for Go Down, Moses and Light In August. These two novels extend the depiction of the impact of temporal and social constructs on man and family and the degradation of artistic ideals.

Chapter 3:

Go Down, Moses: A Meditation On Artistic Transcendence, Man, Society and "Ode On A Grecian Urn"

William Faulkner's Go Down, Moses, is a meditation on John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn". This meditation consists of abstracting images of stasis and temporal themes from the "Ode". However, Faulkner's derivation of imagery, symbolism and themes of time from the "Ode" questions the status of historical and subjective time and timelessness in the modern world. Go Down, Moses also reveals a thematic relation to As I Lay Dying as both novels employ Keatsian references to delineate man's grappling with perceptions of time and meaning. Go Down, Moses amplifies the meditation on Keats' "Ode" by using pastoral themes from the poem in the examination of the concept of capturing and immortalizing a moment of heightened awareness. This novel portrays the desire to perpetually return to this moment and the impact of this desire on the self and the self's perception of time.

Frederick J. Hoffman, in his article, "Faulkner's Concepts of Time", writes that Faulkner speaks of an "Edenic past" which is "a timeless vision or an unhistorical condition existing before and transcending human complication" (Hoffman 292). This "Edenic time" that Hoffman speaks of is portrayed in "The Bear"'s Big Woods which is described as a place separated from man, society and change. The woods are described as the "ancient woods" and "the timeless woods" and entrance into the woods signifies entrance into a place free of time, space, weight and matter (200). For example, Ike's

visit to the Big Woods at the age of ten is described as,

> He entered his novitiate to the true wilderness with Sam beside
> him as he had begun his apprenticeship in miniature to manhood after
> the rabbits and such with Sam beside him, the two of them wrapped in
> the damp, warm, negro-rank quilt while the wilderness
> closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily
> to accept him, opening before his advancement as it
> closed behind his progress, no fixed path the wagon
> followed but a channel non-existent ten yards ahead of
> it and ceasing to exist ten yards after it had passed,
> the wagon progressing not by its own volition but by
> attrition of their intact yet fluid circumambience,
> drowsing, earless, almost lightless (195).

The timelessness of the Big Woods of Ike's youth is accentuated by its opposition to the world of men which is characterized as one of change and tainted with corruption and greed. For example, the contrast between the woods and man is described as,

> It was of the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and
> older than any recorded document: of white man fatuous
> enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it, of
> Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of
> it had been his to convey (191).

The Big Woods is also a timeless place in that it is the site of the hunt, an unchanging ritual of initiation. Thus, Ike knows that "To him, they were going not to hunt bear and deer but to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill" (194).

Hoffman's assertion that there is a portrayal of an Edenic time in Go Down, Moses can be extended to support my argument that this novel meditates on Keats' "Ode". The "Ode" embodies the desire to transcend time and to capture eternal fundamental truths. The stylized arrangement of the hunt in "The Bear" and the participants in the hunt evoke the images on Keats' urn as they both achieve an artistic

transcendence. My position is supported by Blanche H. Gelfant who, in her article, "Faulkner and Keats: The Ideality of Art in "The Bear"", speaks of the theme of art and life as represented in "The Bear". She writes that,

> The function of art is to inform imperfect and evanescent human gestures in such a way that their ideality is revealed. Art and life are antithetical, then, insofar as the subject of art-truth-implies permanence and unity, while the condition of life is change and multiplicity (45).

Gelfant also argues that Faulkner and Keats "both saw beneath the changing sensible appearances in life a permanent reality: they caught glimpses of a truth which must be captured and made transcendent to time through esthetic form" (46-47). Gelfant further argues that Faulkner's "imagination worked through Keatsian images-of movement in time suspended for an interminable minute; of movement in space held static in postures of "immobility"; and of living human gestures transformed into the arrested actions of figures on a frieze" (47). Gelfant also points out that, "This permanently ordered relationship suggests the urn-like quality of Keats' ""brede of marble men" fixed upon the vase and transformed from individuals to archetypal ideals" (49). The transformation of action and movement into idealized ritualized gestures takes place through entrance into the woods and participation in the hunt. For example, the hunt is described as,

> It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardiness to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and reliefed against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter (191-192).

R.W.B. Lewis, in his article,"The Hero in the New World: William Faulkner's "The Bear"" where he writes on the symbolism of the hunt, also posits that the hunt "is the ritual by participation in which the young hero, Isaac McCaslin, becomes reborn and baptized, receives the sacramental blessing and accomplishes his moral liberation" (190). Ike's desire to "earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of hunter" also reflects his desire to fulfill the archetypal role of the hunter, one who displays the timeless qualities of humility, patience, endurance and skill (195,192). In utilizing the hunt as a baptismal rite that can be perpetually re-enacted, Ike is thus reborn again and again, seemingly stalling the progress of time.

Ike's desire to become a part of the unchanging frieze of the hunt is evident even when he is a young child. For example, "The Old People" describes Ike's perception of the killing of his first deer. For Ike, "the buck still and forever leaped, the shaking gunbarrels coming constantly and forever steady at last, crashing, and still out of his instant of immortality the buck sprang, forever immortal" (178). "The Bear" underscores "The Old People"'s delineation of Ike's desire to achieve an artistic transcendence of time through the ritual of the hunt. For example, Ike's reaction to the woods is described as one of deja vu, a sense of the past repeating itself in the present where "It was as if the boy had already divined what his senses and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at" (193). And of participating in the hunt, Ike feels,

> He had experienced it all before, and not merely in dreams. He saw the camp- a paintless six room bungalow set on piles above the spring high-water-and he knew already how it was going to look. He helped in the rapid orderly disorder of their establishment in it and even his motions were familiar to him, foreknown (195-196).

In aspiring to be the idealized figure of the hunter, Ike is unable to accept the death of the bear and so accept change. As Gelfant points out, Ike "becomes fixed in a posture of arrested motion...His change from man to artifact, to an immutable figure within a work of art, begins to take place at the moment when as a boy he stands transfixed before the bear he will never shoot" (52). Because Ike is unable to accept the death of Old Ben, he also cannot understand why he did not shoot when he had the chance. Hence, he cannot answer when McCaslin queries Ike with "But you didn't shoot when you had the gun...Why?" (296). McCaslin must answer for Ike and he does so by quoting Keats' "Ode", emphasizing the second stanza. For example, the novel describes, ""All right," he said. "Listen," and read again, but only one stanza this time and closed the book and laid it on the table. "She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss," McCaslin said: "Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair"" (296-297). Ike interprets McCaslin's reading as,

> Somehow it had seemed simpler than that, simpler than somebody talking in a book about a young man and a girl he would never need to grieve over because he could never approach any nearer and would never have to get any further away (297).

Yet, he still cannot comprehend that in his interpretation lies the answer to his dilemma. McCaslin, in his role as Ike's oracle, however, recognizes that Ike is akin to the wooing lover on the urn. Knowing that Ike seeks transcendence through artistic ideals, he again tries to help Ike by pointing out that "Courage and honor and pride, and pity and love of justice and of liberty. They all touch the heart, and what the heart holds to becomes truth, as far as we know truth. Do you see now?" (297). Just as the wooing lover is eternally transfixed in a posture of infatuated supplication, so does Ike long to forever participate in the ritual hunt and take on the role of the idealized hunter.

Keats' "Ode" depicts the seduction of a speaker who becomes enamored with the urn's ability to be timeless. His lyrical ecstasy is apparent when he lauds the urn with "Ah happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed / Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu" (21-22). However, the speaker, in the lines "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!", indicates his withdrawal from the urn and his recognition of the sterility implicit in art's attempt to transcend change (44-45). The speaker's conclusion indicates his realization that the aspirations of art and life are incompatible. Art aspires towards transcendence and the capturing of immutable truths while the essence of life is change. Hence, the speaker's parting lines of "Beauty is truth, truth-beauty-that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" implies that to base earthly life on an artistic ideal is ultimately to limit life. Life is predicated on change, evolution and growth whilst Art longs for temporal transcendence. McCaslin's citation of Keats' "Ode" to explain Ike's reaction to the Bear and the hunt underscores the inability of Ike to differentiate between art and life. Unlike the speaker of the poem who is able to withdraw from the urn, Ike wishes to meld with art and to become a figure in the frieze of the ritual hunt.

Henri Bergson points out in Matter and Memory that, "Memory, inseparable in practice from perception, imports the past into the present, contracts into a single intuition many moments of duration" (73). Memory's investiture of significance on an event then confers on that event an aura of immortality. Bergson's position on the function of memory in man is exemplified in Ike. The thematic concept of timelessness applies not only to the ritual hunt but to Ike's perception of the hunt and the death of Old Ben. Because Ike does not appreciate the significance of the Bear's death, he is locked into a perpetual cycle of puzzled longing. For the rest of his life, Ike seeks to recapture

the meaning of the hunt, endlessly revolving in his mind the moment of Old Ben's demise. The memory of the hunt and of Old Ben acquire, then, a timeless aspect. The parameters of Ike's life take on the shape of cyclical time for his present and future is shaped by and revolves around his preoccupation with the memory of Old Ben's death. Hence it is that Ike, desperately trying to transcend the "taint" of change and become once more an idealized iconographic figure, elects to become a poor carpenter like Jesus Christ "because if the Nazarene had found carpentering good for the life and ends He had assumed and elected to serve, it would be all right too for Isaac McCaslin" (309). This portrayal of Ike and the cyclical nature of memory is implicitly linked to the theme of timelessness and artistic transcendence in Keats' "Ode". My position is reinforced by Hilayne Cavanaugh, who, in her Ph. D., thesis analyzes the theme of stasis in "The Bear". Cavanaugh points out that "Ike mistakes the poem's ideal, aesthetic values, making literal the message of the Ode and thus grasping at the static sanctuary it seems to offer from real life" and so he becomes "a prisoner of the Urn" (94,96). I would also point out that Ike's imprisonment in cyclical time implicitly indicates that the pastoral ideal of artistic transcendence as depicted in the "Ode" is undesirable in the modern world.

Ike, attempting to grapple with the ramifications of the ritual hunt and the death of Old Ben, contemplates the relationship of man with the land. In his heritage, his paternity, Ike sees the same corruption which he believes has tainted the land. Ike believes,

> He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures,
> and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to
> hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in
> His name, not to hold for himself and his descendents
> inviolable title forever, generation after generation,
> to the oblongs and squares of the earth, but to hold

> the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity
> of brotherhood (257).

Hence to own and trade land is to break faith with God and seal the doom of man and the land. This doom is manifested in the corrupting, degenerative influence of the passage of time, symbolized in the progress of the plantation and the evolution of the McCaslin bloodline. For example, Ike sees landownership as

> ...that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded
> upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity and
> carried on even yet with at times downright savagery
> not only to the human beings but the valuable animals
> too, yet solvent and efficient and, more than that: not
> only still intact but enlarged, increased; brought
> still intact by McCaslin, himself little more than a
> child then, through and out of the debacle and chaos of
> twenty years ago where hardly one in ten survived, and
> enlarged and increased and would continue so, solvent
> and efficient and intact and still increasing so long
> as McCaslin and his McCaslin successors lasted (298).

Ike believes that the white landowners are cursed for owning land and their curse has also cursed the lot of the blacks. For example, he cries out to Fonsiba's husband, "Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse?" (278). Ike sees himself bound to his bloodline by a "frail and iron thread strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself and reaching beyond record and patrimony" (299). In order to cleanse himself and halt the corrupting march of time that wends its way through the machinery of his family's plantation and the clan, Ike repudiates his patrimony by rejecting the plantation and his familial inheritance. Instead, Ike embraces the symbol of the Bear and Sam Fathers as the antithesis of what his family represents and believes "I am free...yes, Sam Fathers set me free" (209-300).

Ike's desire to repudiate change is also evident in his shocked reaction to a Big Woods that has been subjected to industrialization. For example, Ike decides to visit the camp "one more time before the lumber company moved in and began to cut the timber" (315). When he arrives at Hokes', he reacts to the march of progress,

> ...in shocked and grieved amazement even though he had had forewarning and had believed himself prepared: a new planing-mill already half completed which would cover two or three acres and what looked like miles and miles of stacked steel rails red with the light bright rust of newness and of piled crossties sharp with creosote, and wire corrals and feeding-troughs for two hundred mules at least and the tents for the men who drove them (318).

Even the local train, once seen as intrinsic to the yearly hunting ritual, where "Walter Ewell had shot a six-point buck from this same moving caboose", is now seen as an agent of change so that Ike repeats to himself that "It had been harmless once...It had been harmless then...but it was different now" (318,319). Ike's inability to absorb historical change is also evident in his ambivalent attitude towards the woods. Whilst recognizing the woods as no longer inviolable, at the same time Ike still looks towards the last remnants of the Big Woods as a sanctuary. For example, Ike turns away from the bustle of Hoke and "looked no more save toward the wall of wilderness ahead within which he would be able to hide himself from it once more anyway" (318). However, Ike implicitly recognizes his failure to repudiate change when he believes himself contaminated by it and feels himself unable to become the untainted image of an idealized figure in an unchanging frieze. For example, Ike believes,

> ...it was as though the train (and not only the train but himself, not only his vision which had seen it and his memory which remembered it but his clothes too, as

> garments carry back into the clean edgeless blowing of
> air the lingering effluvium of a sick-room or of death)
> had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even
> before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new
> mill not even finished yet (321).

Although Ike is not entirely successful in repudiating the changes he sees around him, his efforts to recreate the Big Woods that he holds in his memory underscores the power of memory to confer eternity. For example, Ike is able to ignore the train as a symbol of change by insisting "Then it was gone. It had not been. He could no longer hear it. The wilderness soared, musing, inattentive, myriad, eternal, green; older than any mill-shed, longer than any spur-line" (322). The ability of memory to confer timelessness is also underscored when Ike recalls past hunts and he is once again able to be a part of the woods. For example, he enters the woods "not alone but solitary; the solitude closed about him, green with summer. They did not change, and, timeless, would not, anymore than would the green of summer and the fire and rain of fall and the iron cold and sometimes even snow" (323). His strengthened perception of the woods as eternal is a tragically ironic reminder of the strength of his denial of change as the Big Woods, once evocative of an Edenic timelessness, are being cut down and sold off. His visit with the woods is closed with a further affirmation of the endlessly cyclical nature of the woods where he senses "summer, and fall, and snow, and wet and saprife spring in their ordered immortal sequence" (326).

The ability of Ike's memory to shape the present with recollections of the past is clearly enunciated when he encounters the snake on his return to the woods and his mind is again flooded with reminiscences. He describes the snake as "the old one, the ancient and accursed about the earth, fatal and solitary and he could smell it now: the thin sick smell of rotting cucumbers and something else which had no name, evocative of all

knowledge and an old wearinesss and of pariah-hood and of death" (329). Ike's perception of the snake is shaped by and is a projection of his perception of the deceased Bear and Sam Fathers as timeless and immortal. Ike's perception of a present event which is colored by his perception of the past is also indicative of how he perceives his self. Hence as he regards the snake, Ike, wishing to be again an idealized figure in a frieze, unconsciously imitates Sam, "standing with one hand raised as Sam had stood that afternoon six years ago when Sam led him into the wilderness and showed him and he ceased to be a child, speaking the old tongue which Sam had spoken that day without premeditation either: "Chief," he said: "Grandfather"" (330).

"Delta Autumn" emphasizes the power of Ike's memory to recreate an Edenic timelessness outlined in "The Bear" and "The Old People". For more than fifty years, Ike has made an annual trip to a steadily diminishing Big Woods where "The paths made by deer and bear became roads and then highways, with towns in turn springing up along them" (340). Yet, still Ike seeks the solace of timelessness so that as he travels towards what is left of the woods,

> ...it seemed to him that the retrograde of his remembering
> had gained an inverse velocity from their own slow
> progress, that the land had retreated not in minutes
> from the last spread of gravel but in years, decades,
> back toward what it had been when he first knew it: the
> road they now followed once more the ancient pathway of
> bear and deer, the diminishing fields they now passed
> once more scooped punily and terrifically by axe and
> saw and mule-drawn plow from the wilderness' flank
> (341-342).

Even in his eighties, Ike still sees himself as juxtaposed to the land. He still desires to achieve the timelessness of the Grecian urn by becoming a part of the woods and so,

> He seemed to see the two of them-himself and the

> wilderness-as coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman, not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that old Sam Fathers who had taught him to hunt, the two spans running together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space (354).

Hence, instead of the progression of time as evidenced in the diminishing woods, Ike sees that "The twin banks marched with wilderness as he remembered it-the tangle of brier and cane impenetrable even to sight twenty feet away" (342).

In "Faulkner's Commentary on Go Down, Moses", as transcribed by Frederick J. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, William Faulkner said of Go Down, Moses that "change must alter, must happen, and change is going to alter what was. That no matter how fine anything seems, it can't endure because once it stops, abandons motion, it is dead" (Gwynn and Blotner 117). Faulkner's statement clarifies the thematic position held in Go Down, Moses that change and evolution is life. This position is apparent in "Delta Autumn" which makes clear that, in repudiating change, Ike has entered a living death. Ike spends his life "waiting for November", unable to progress and evolve outside of the hunt. The static nature of his life is emphasized when Edmonds asks of Ike, "so you've lived almost eighty years...I suppose the question to ask you is, where have you been all the time you were dead?" (345). Ike is presented as an ineffectual old man who speaks but cannot act. For example, he says "I think that every man and woman, at the instant when it dont even matter whether they marry or not, I think that whether they marry then or afterward or dont never, at that instant the two of them together were God" (348). Yet, his passionate words are shown as hollow and meaningless for, in embracing his desire for transcendence, he became wifeless and childless. For example, as the novel describes, Ike sees "himself and his wife juxtaposed in their turn against that same land,

that same wrong and shame from whose regret and grief he would at least save and free his son and, saving and freeing his son, lost him" (351). Hence, he is unable to understand the passion within Edmonds' mistress who scorns him with "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?" (363). Ike's investiture in a ritual that is ultimately empty and meaningless is starkly evident in the closing of "Delta Autumn" when the hunters, once portrayed as mystical figures full of humility and courage, break a hunting taboo and kill a doe.

"The Bear" ends on a note of ridicule for the story ends with the image of Boon "hammering the disjointed barrel against the gun-breech with the frantic abandon of a madman" while the tree against which he is leaning is filled with squirrels that "would dart down the trunk then whirl without stopping and rush back up again as though sucked violently back by the vacuum of their fellows' frenzied vortex" (331). This concluding image inverts Ike's perception of the hunt as a timeless hallowed tradition for Boon, once seen as Sam's "huntsman", is reduced to the actions of a madman, guarding a tree full of squirrels (222). Ike's persistence in embracing pastoral ideals of honour and courage is thus shown as an act of madness. This concluding image of Boon supports Gelfant's article which concludes that the thematic presence of Keat's urn in "The Bear" is used to point out that Art and Life are incompatible. However, I would assert that the presence of the metaphor of the Keatsian urn in "The Bear" contains a much more profound message. "The Bear" not only points out that the struggle for artistic transcendence must give way against the onslaught of impervious change but that such ideals may no longer exist. Such a message is evident in the symbol of the Keatsian wooing lover. The frieze of the wooing lover on the Keatsian urn is a pivotal image in the poem and it is also a

crucial symbol for the description of Old Ben's death. For example, the bear's death is described as "This time the bear didn't strike him down. It caught the dog in both arms, almost loverlike, and they both went down...It fell just once. For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man stride its back" (240-241). Just as the symbol of the wooing Keatsian lover is predicated on his eternal posture of desire, so to is the mystery of Old Ben predicated on his ability to vanquish death and to symbolize eternal truths of courage and honour. The use of such imagery to describe the bear's death emphasizes the association of the bear with pastoral timeless ideals of honour, courage and artistic transcendence. Hence, the bear's death is indicative of the death of these ideals and is equivalent to the destruction of the Keatsian urn. It is a signal that an escape from change through artistic transcendence is no longer possible. Thus, the death of the bear is a shockingly apocalyptic moment, befitting the passing of an era.

The stultifying nature of Ike's desire to remain in stasis is reinforced by "The Fire and the Hearth". For example, Ike repudiates his patrimony and so his wife, believing that "still the woods would be his mistress and his wife" (326). "The Fire and the Hearth" underlines the familial comforts of hearth and family and of being grounded in the reality of the present and the promise of the future. For example, this story describes the significance Lucas Beauchamp invests in the hearth fire. He insists on "keeping alive on the hearth the fire he had lit there on their wedding day and which had burned ever since" (46). When his wife, Molly, becomes the live-in housekeeper and mistress to Zack Edmonds, Lucas becomes enraged and feels the urge to douse the hearth fire and "he caught himself standing over it, furious, bursting, blind, the cedar water bucket already poised until he caught himself and set the bucket back on the shelf" (47). Instead, he chooses to believe in the timeless nature of the institution of marriage and "keeping alive

the fire which was to burn on the hearth until neither he nor Molly were left to feed it" (47). Lucas' infatuation with finding the hidden treasure of gold coins again tests the foundation of his marriage and echoes Ike's infatuation with recreating the frieze of the hunt. Aunt Molly, recognizing that Lucas' obsession will ultimately destroy her, Lucas and Nat, presses for a divorce. In the face of her adamant wish for a divorce, Lucas recants, realizing that "Man has got three score and ten years on this earth, the Book says. He can want a heap in that time and a heap of what he can want is due to come to him, if he just starts in soon enough. I done waited too late to start" (131). Lucas Beauchamp's decision provides a foil to the blinded character of Ike McCaslin who repudiates his wife and the fruits of marriage and family.

"Pantaloon In Black" echoes "The Fire and the Hearth"'s theme of a reality that is grounded in family and hearth and expands "Delta Autumn"'s theme of memory's investiture of timelessness in reminiscences. For example, Rider had "built a fire on the hearth on their wedding night as the tale told how Uncle Lucas Beauchamp, Edmonds' oldest tenant, had done on his forty-five years ago and which had burned ever since" (138). However, after Mannie dies, Rider becomes like Ike, lost and purposeless, caught in the moment of death. Just as Ike recreates the past in the present, Rider still sees in the dust of the road "fixed and held in the annealing dust, the narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife's bare feet" (137). Time for Rider becomes cyclical, forever revolving around one significant event, Mannie's death, and so he must forever travel "the junctureless backloop of time's trepan" (152). Knowing this, Rider in despair cries out "Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking. Look lack Ah just cant quit" (159).

"The Fire and The Hearth" and "Pantaloon In Black" seem to suggest that the acceptance of change can be achieved by investing in the pastoral ideal of family and

matrimony. However, if "The Bear" is interpreted as a thematic signal that pastoral ideals are dead, then "Go Down, Moses" which ends the novel may be similarly interpreted as throwing the pastoral ideal of love in an ambivalent light. This tone of doubt is derived from Mollie Beauchamp's efforts to bring her grandson back home. Mollie, who symbolizes the call of home and hearth, is shown as ineffectual. Her love of her grandson cannot keep him from harm. All she can do is mourn his death and bring his dead body home for burial. Mollie's ineffectualness is apparent when she turns to Gavin Stephens for help. As she sits in Gavin Stevens' office, she begins to repeat "Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him" (371). Mollie's chant casts her grandson, Samuel, as a slave subject to the whim of white landowners, as represented by Roth Edmonds, and Pharoah as the machinery of white society who intends to execute Samuel.. Her chant, which is a direct evocation of the black spiritual, "Let My People Go", underlines not only her own sense of loss but the sense of confusion and abandonment pervasive throughout society. This need for deliverance is clearly enunciated in "Let My People Go", whose refrain is "Go down, Moses, 'way down in Egypt's land; / Tell ole Pharaoh / Let my people go" (Thurman 13). This spiritual in turn refers to Exodus 32:7. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, receiving God's commandments, his people who were waiting below became filled with doubt and began to worship idols. God, seeing this, said to Moses "Go get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves". This biblical extract indicates that there was once a leader who provided guidance. By referring to this extract in the title of the concluding chapter as well as in the title of the novel, Go Down, Moses becomes a plaintive clarion call for the need for guidance in today's society. In this context the death of the bear symbolizes the death of artistic

ideals. Hence, with the death of the bear, the novel implicitly asks, "What now is there to aspire to?" Who will be the new Moses to come down and lead society into a new age?

Like As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses exemplifies William Faulkner's contemplation of John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" by drawing themes and images of temporal and artistic transcendence from the poem. Go Down, Moses extends As I Lay Dying's meditation by exploring the problem of transferring the desire for temporal transcendence to the reality of a life which must be lived in the present. The ramification of such a desire is to mire the self in a non-progressive pattern of cyclical time where the past is the present and the future. However, even if a balance is struck between artistic aspiration and life, both novels, in extracting and setting romantic, idealistic themes and concepts from Keats' poem against the backdrop of the modern world, point to the conclusion that such artistic concepts are being rendered obsolete. As I Lay Dying and Go Down, Moses also join together in voicing a deep concern about the future of society. Both novels insist that love, passion and family no longer exist in the modern world and do not offer anything or anyone else to aspire to.

Chapter 4:

Light In August: A Multi-Dimensional Meditation On Time, Society, Man and "Ode On A Grecian Urn"

William Faulkner's Light In August echoes and extends the meditation on John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" that is established in Go Down, Moses and As I Lay Dying. Both Go Down, Moses and As I Lay Dying meditate on Keats' poem by employing themes and images of time and timelessness from the "Ode" in their thematic and character development. Light In August draws on similar images and themes from the "Ode" in its thematic examination of the interrelationship between man's spiritual evolution, society and ideals of time. Light In August extends the meditation on John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" by inverting the pastoral scenes in the "Ode" with an injection of a note of tragedy and derision. This despairing note comments on the present and future status of romantic ideals in present day society.

"Ode On A Grecian Urn" portrays a mythical time and of mythical figures existing in this time. Light In August acknowledges the influence of this poem in its characterization, specifically that of Joe Christmas. Joe Christmas is cast in the mold of a mythic figure. The most obvious reference lies in his name which conjures up Christ-like tragic heroic overtones. For example, Byron thinks,

> And that was the first time Byron remembered that he had ever thought how a man's name, which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is, can be somehow an augur of what he will do, if other men can only read the meaning in time. It seemed to him that none of them had looked especially at the stranger until they heard his name. But as soon as they heard it, it was as

> though there was something in the sound of it that was
> trying to tell them what to expect; that he carried
> with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its
> scent or a rattlesnake its rattle. Only none of them
> had sense enough to recognize it (29).

As well, like a iconographic mythic figure, Christmas is searching for redemption and salvation. Christmas' salvation lies in the realization of his identity, a struggle which confronts all of humankind. He also symbolizes, in his miscegenation and search for identity, the racial division that exists in the society in which he lives. As Donald M. Kartiganer writes in his article, "Light in August", where he analyzes Joe Christmas' character, "he is the model of the division known to all" (95). Hence, like a mythic hero, Joe Christmas is a reflection of the strengths and failures inherent in society.

Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" has a speaker who vainly attempts to define a silent, unreachable urn. The speaker persistently asks, "What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild / ecstasy?" (7-10). The speaker's attempt indicates that language itself can be seen as urn or receptacle-like. Words are vessels into which society imports meaning. It is by these meanings that members of society can guide its thoughts and actions. This view of language can also be seen in Light In August for Joe Christmas is Light In August's urn of which he and society both attempt to define. Joe Christmas does not know whether he is black or white and so does not know which socially derived persona to pour himself into. Because he does not know what he is, society also does not know how to categorize him. For example, Christmas is described in the novel as "there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. And that he carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely and almost proud"

(27). Society's struggle to define Joe Christmas by encapsulating him in preconceived vessels of social myths of white and negro is apparent in other characters' reactions to him. For example, when the dietitian discovers Joe in her closet, in her fury she immediately associates him with an image of negativity, calling him "You little nigger bastard!"" (114). Bobbie, too, in reaction to her humiliation at being called a "Harlot" by McEachern and her fear of being chased by the police, rejects Joe by attaching blame to his racial identity. She screams at him, "Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!" (204). Ultimately, Joe Christmas is left without meaning, emotionally and spiritually. Hence it is that he drifts from town to town and when he finally arrives in Jefferson, "He did not know the name of the town; he didn't care what word it used for name" (213).

Joe Christmas' struggle with social stereotypes recalls the character of Addie Bundren in As I Lay Dying. Addie Bundren also faces a society which attempts to encapsulate her within words, specifically the words of wife and mother. She knows that words are social constructs which are supposed to capture meaning but which are unable to capture her own perceptions and meanings. Addie's interpretation of language also contains "receptacle" imagery which itself conjures up images of the Keatsian urn and of a speaker attempting to capture in words a timeless object. For example, in response to Anse's overtures, Addie's thinks, "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" (158). Addie Bundren is a counterpoint to Joe Christmas for, by identifying words as meaningless, she is able to escape the conceptual confines of language. However, Joe Christmas is bound by his belief in the validity of language and his

concurrent desire to conform to social constructs. So, he is forever caught between two concepts of persona.

Like a mythic figure caught in a frieze on the side of the Keatsian urn, Joe Christmas can never escape his haunted quest to solve the puzzle of his identity. The utilization of the Keatsian urn as a metaphor and epitaph to Joe Christmas' doomed despair is obvious in the description of his life after he is beaten up by Bobbie Allen's cohorts and runs away from the McEacherns'. For example, after running away, "From that night the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene" (210). From then on, his life continuously traces the same path of inarticulate frustration and, in despair, he wonders,

> He thought that it was loneliness which he was trying to escape and not himself. But the street ran on: catlike; one place was the same as another to him. But in none of them could he be quiet. But the street ran on in its moods and phases, always empty: he might have seen himself as in numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair; by the despair of courage whose opportunities had to be flagged and spurred (213).

At one point in his rootless wanderings, he lived "with a woman who resembled an ebony carving" in a desperate, concerted attempt to be "black" (212). At night, lying beside her,

> He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his white chest arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being. And all the while his nostrils at the odor which he was trying to make his own would whiten and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial (212).

However, again, he is unable to reach a resolution of his identity. Joe Christmas' life has thus been expended in a fruitless limbo between two social concepts, black and white, without any hope of reconciliation or progression. This portrayal inverts the dominant refrain of pastoral idyllicism in Keats' "Ode" into one of tragedy. Such an inversion implicitly states that the ideals of artistic and temporal transcendence are disabling and degenerative.

The ideal of the Keatsian urn is also apparent in Joe Christmas' search for order in his relationships with women. For most of his life, Christmas' relationships with women have been marked by disorder. For example, Christmas' relationship with the dietitian is marked by disorder in communication. She believes that he is punishing her with his knowledge of her affair with the doctor. The dietitian believes,

> ...that he not only intended to tell, but that he deferred doing it deliberately in order to make her suffer more. It never occurred to her that he believed that he was the one who had been taken in sin and was being tortured with punishment deferred and that he was putting himself in her way in order to get it over with, get his whipping and strike the balance and write it off (115).

When she attempts to bribe him with a silver dollar, he reacts "with astonishment, shock, outrage. Looking at the dollar, he seemed to see ranked tubes of toothpaste like corded wood, endless and terrifying; his whole being coiled in a rich and passionate revulsion" (117). This disorder that is inherent in Joe's relationship with the dietitian is repeated in his relationship with Mrs. McEachern. He believes that, of Mr. McEachern, "The man, the hard, just, ruthless man, merely depended on him to act in a certain way and to receive the as certain reward or punishment, just as he could depend on the man to react in a certain way to his own certain doings and misdoings" (157). However, he reacts to Mrs. McEachern's fumbling attempts to establish a secret relationship with him with the

belief that "It was the woman who, with a woman's affinity and instinct for secrecy, for casting a faint taint of evil about the most trivial and innocent actions" (157).

The female figure becomes representative to Joe Christmas of chaos and yet in this disorder Joe Christmas struggles to find an ideal of love that is Keatsian in nature. For example, he sees women as urn-like, "the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled" (173). However, unlike the romantic Keatsian ideal of idyllic womanhood portrayed on the urn's friezes, Joe Christmas also sees women's "superior shape" as "doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth" (173). Like the priest in the Keatsian urn's frieze who sacrifices a heifer, Joe kills a sheep to protect himself from the "filth" that contaminates womankind and to pay homage to "the smooth and superior shape" that is the true image of womanhood. After killing the sheep "he knelt, his hands in the yet warm blood of the dying beast, trembling, drymouthed, backglaring...It was as if he said, illogical and desperately calm *All right. It is so, then. But not to me. Not in my life and my love*" (174). Joe's desperate desire to find a love that is pure and idealized, that will lift him away from the chaos of his supposed miscegenation, blossoms in his relationship with Bobbie Allen. When she tells him she is menstruating, he flees into the woods and,

> In the notseeing and the hardknowing as though in a
> cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely
> shaped urns in moonlight, blanched. And not one was
> perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack
> there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul.
> He touched a tree, leaning his propped arms against it,
> seeing the ranked and moonlit urns. He vomited (177-178).

However, he returns to Bobbie Allen, hoping somehow that their love will bring order to the irreconciliable duality of his existence and they begin their physical relationship in the woods which he initially had seen as ranked rows of defiled urns. He even tells

Bobbie of his secret fear that "I think I got some nigger blood in me", hoping that the exchange of secrets will seal their love (184). As Donald M. Kartiganer, in his article, "Light In August", where he writes on the character of Joe Christmas, writes, "He becomes involved with Bobbie despite his initial disgust; more than that he reveals his suspicions about his black blood, not as a weapon as in subsequent encounters, but simply as a part of his identity: the blackness he discloses to her even as he has received and accepted hers" (98). Kartiganer further posits that "Joe discovers that Bobbie is a prostitute, but he is still prepared at the last to marry her, as if his notions of black and white could actually coexist, cancel each other out in the love of a man and a woman. It is this belief of Joe's that gives the episode with Bobbie a curiously idyllic quality" (99).

Richard Chase, in his article, "The Stone and The Crucifixion: Faulkner's Light in August", where he analyzes theme and characterization in this novel, posits that "curve" imagery is associated with Joe Christmas' character. Chase writes that the curve delineates, "the fateful circle of repetition which he has never really either escaped or broken and which is the only path to the kind of holism he will ever find: death" (541). I would point out that this curve imagery that Chase speaks of can also be applied to the argument that the physical image of the Keatsian urn itself is being employed in Light In August to portray Joe Christmas. This curve imagery that is descriptive of Joe Christmas indicates that he is not only a figure caught in a frieze but that he is caught in a non-progressive circular time frame, much as the urn itself is caught in stasis. For example, after killing Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas buys a pair of brogans from a negro woman. As he puts them on "It seemed to him that he would see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered" (313). Still unable to

reconcile his identity, in despair he takes on the hated, abhorred image of the negro murderer of a white woman in an attempt to find the peace that has eluded him for thirty years. As he takes on this identity, he thinks, "That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years"" (313). However, even as Christmas accepts death by taking on a negroid persona, he is full of anguish knowing,

> ...he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled further than in all the thirty years before. And yet he is still inside the circle (321).

Joe Christmas realizes that "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" (321).

Death to Joe Christmas can only be a release from the circle of doomed despair that he has been continuously tracing, the only avenue by which he can break free of the circular temporal path that has entrapped him. And because he is cast in the mold of the mythic hero who stands outside of and above society, his death takes on mythic proportions. To the witnesses of his death,

> ...the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant (440).

However, even in death, society still attempts to understand his motivations in terms of pre-defined categories. For example, Gavin Stevens believes, "Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistols and the white blood which would not let him fire it." (424). The manner of Joe Christmas' death not only sends out a warning

knell about the constrictive use of language by society but also about the future that society faces. The killer of Joe Christmas is Percy Grimm, a young man who is fired with,

> ...a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privelege, would be his own life (426-427).

In killing Joe Christmas, the tragic Christ-like hero, Percy Grimm becomes the new messiah. This ascension, I would assert, is a troubling comment on the direction of society. Pastoral ideals of love, courage and honour will not survive in this new age of blind zealousness.

Joanna Burden is an amalgamation of all the forces that Joe Christmas is struggling with. Joe has spent his life trying to bridge the gap between the blackness and whiteness within him. Similarly, Joanna cannot escape the destiny laid down by her New England forebears. She is bound by her father's stricture that her destiny is inextricably tied to "the curse which God put on a whole race before your grandfather or your brother or me or you were even thought of. A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sin" (239). As well, she cannot expunge from her soul her father's admonishment that,

> You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level. I see that now, which I did not see until I came down here. But escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed Him (240).

Joanna Burden can never escape the past created by her forebears. Hence, her present and future are her ancestral past so that she too is caught in a cyclical time frame.

Francois L. Pitavy, in his article "A Stylistic Approach to Light In August" where he analyzes the patterns of images in the novel, also interprets the images of the circle and the Keatsian urn in Light In August as warnings against a life of stasis. For example, he points out that "the circle is found again in the image of the urn...its timeless and rounded perfection can be a false sanctuary, offering no refuge against time passing and the arrows of fortune, and it appears to be cracked and foul-an object of nausea" (197). Joanna Burden exemplifies this viewpoint. Burdened by her father's stricture, Joanna Burden's life exemplifies the unvarying sterility of the Keatsian urn. For example,

> ...for a certain period of each forenoon she would sit at the worn, scarred rolltop desk in one of the scarce-used and sparsely furnished downstairs rooms, writing steadily, before he learned that what she received were business and private documents and what she sent were replies-advice, business, financial and religious, to the presidents and faculties and trustees, and advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnae, of a dozen negro schools and colleges through the south (220).

The circular, unvarying pattern of Joanna Burden's life is also emphasized in the attitude of people who seek her help. For example, the novel describes,

> All day long he would imagine her, going about her housework, sitting for that unvarying period at the scarred desk, or talking, listening, to the negro women who came to the house from both directions up and down the road, following paths which had been years in the wearing and which radiated from the house like wheelspokes (243).

Joanna Burden does try to break free of her heritage by engaging in an affair with Joe Christmas. Voraciously trying to compensate for years of lonely deprivation, she

conducts the affair "as if she believed that it would be the last night on earth by damning herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth" (244). However, as Olga Vickery points out in her analysis of Light In August's characters and plot in The Novels of William Faulkner, Joanna is a "bifurcated individual" who "is not entirely free of her intellectual heritage" (75-76). Hence, by day, she reverts back to being a "calm, coldfaced, almost manlike, almost middleaged woman...who spent a certain portion of each day sitting tranquilly at a desk and writing tranquilly for the eyes of both youth and age the practical advice of a combined priest and banker and trained nurse" (244). As Joanna experiences menopause and her desire to furiously abandon herself in her physical relationship begins to wane, she knows that she will be left again with her Calvinist heritage. Thus, she thinks, ""Dont make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while"(250). Finally though, exhausted of her desire to indulge in "carnal sin", she retreats into the categories of savior and martyr that her forebears have mapped out for her and attempts to force this perception of her self onto Joe Christmas by urging him "to take over all her business affairs-the correspondence and the periodical visits-with the negro schools" (254). When he rejects her plan to "better" his lot in life, she then attempts to force him to pray with her. When Joe Christmas again refuses to participate in her idealizations and perceptions, she must resort to violence in order to preserve her perceptions of herself as a white savior of an oppressed negro. Hence, Joanna Burden is the female parallel of Joe Christmas as she too is caught forever tracing a circular path.

While Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden exemplify figures in stasis, Lena is their antithesis on the Keatsian urn. She too is represented as a figure out of time but is portrayed as a mythic female figure of serenity, plenitude and fertility. This viewpoint is

upheld in Andre Bleikasten's article "In Praise of Helen" where he writes, "Lena belongs to this pure mythic space prior to the fall into time" (131). Bleikasten also points out that this portrayal of Lena is evident in her name. He holds that "Faulkner called her after Helen, the Spartan princess who caused the Trojan war, the daughter of Zeus whose bewitching beauty equalled that of the fairest goddesses" (131). This representation of Lena is underscored by Faulkner himself who, in referring to the title of the novel, said,

> ...in August in Mississippi there's a few days somewhere about the middle of the month when suddenly there's a foretaste of fall, it's cool, there's a lambence, a luminous quality to the light, as though it came not from just today but from back in the old classic times...Maybe the connection was with Lena Grove, who had something of that pagan quality of being able to assume everything (Bleikasten 133).

Hence, Lena is an iconographic figure placed against a background of Edenic, natural time. In this sense, she recalls the figures or icons on the Keatsian urn which are symbolic of a mythic age.

Lena Grove also amplifies the character of Dewey Dell in As I Lay Dying. Dewey Dell is portrayed not so much as a product of man and society but a product of the natural cycles of the earth. For example, Dewey Dell is described as thinking "I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (58). As well, Dewey Dell's pregnancy exemplifies her connection with natural time as it is described as occurring almost without volition or conscious control. She thinks,

> We picked on down the row, the woods getting closer and closer and the secret shade, picking on into the secret shade with my sack and Lafe's sack. Because I said will I or wont I when the sack was half full because I said if the sack is full when we get to the woods it wont be me (23).

Lena Grove's relationship with Lucas Burch is described in a similar manner. For example, Light In August describes,

> She had lived there eight years before she opened the window for the first time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all. She said to herself, 'That's just my luck' (3).

Whereas Dewey Dell is portrayed as bowing down to society's ostracism of unwed motherhood and so is shown as becoming divorced from the cycles of the earth with her desperate conniving schemes to obtain an abortion, Lena Grove is portrayed as a true iconographic figure that is impervious to the eddying tides of social whims. She calmly accepts her pregnancy, believing that she will find Lucas Burch who will then become her husband and a father to her child. For example, Lena Grove is described as having a face "calm as stone, but not hard. Its doggedness has a soft quality, an inwardlighted quality of tranquil and calm unreason and detachment" (15).

Darrel Abel, in his article "Frozen Movement in Light in August", interprets symbolic patterns in the portrayal of characters in this novel. In this article, there is a superficial comment on the relationship between Lena and the Keatsian urn. He posits that,

> ...the countryside across which Lena travels is, like the "silent form" of Keats' urn, a designated image or visible metaphor of eternity. The stories of Lena Grove and Joe Christmas constitute the "legend" (or "brede" or "frieze") seen against this immutable image of eternity (34).

Abel defines Lena and Joe Christmas' "legends" as "expressions, moments, postures, phases of a human reality into which all personal realities fade" (Abel 35). Abel's position can be applied to my argument that Light In August is a meditation on Keats'

"Ode". Lena is more than a mere icon of unrequited love from a pastoral scene. She is a catalyst of renewal and rejuvenation. This representation of Lena is underscored in the relations of other characters to her. For example, Gavin Stevens, in speaking of Mrs. Hines, believes that the birth of Lena's child caused Mrs. Hines to live and have hope again. He believes, "I dont think that the hoping machine had got started then, either. I dont think that it ever did start until that baby was born out there this morning, born right in her face" (421). Because Lena is the figure of all mothers and of the promise of fecundity, rebirth and renewal, it is not surprising that Mrs. Hines should confuse her with Milly. This effect of renewal is also apparent with Hightower. When Hightower is forced to help with the birth of Lena's child, he feels rejuvenated and "there goes through him a glow, a wave, a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant. 'I showed them!' he thinks. 'Life comes to the old man yet'"(382-383). Lena's effect is also deeply apparent with Byron Bunch. He is initially described as a nondescript man "who has spent six days of every week for seven years at the planing mill, feeding boards into the machinery" (42). When Byron falls in love and decides to install Lena in Lucas Brown's cabin and look after her, Hightower immediately notices that, "Byron is completely changed. It shows in his walk, his carrriage...*As though he has learned pride, or defiance* Byron's head is erect, he walks fast and erect" (294).

Lena is out of time and yet she is also of time itself, of cyclical and natural time. This viewpoint is upheld by Bleikasten who writes,

> Lena moves in the timeless time of eternal recurrence, along a soft curve retracing and rejoining itself in a circle ever rebegun...throbbing with the pulse of living matter, and so quite naturally attuned to the unchanging cycle of days, months, and years (129).

Hence, as she advances towards Jefferson, time is described as

> ...a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes
> from day to dark and dark to day again, through which she
> advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons
> as though through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared
> avatars, like something moving forever and without
> progress across an urn (5).

The wagon that Lena is riding is symbolic of the eternal unchanged aura that imbues this character. Lena is initially depicted as heading towards Jefferson, riding in a wagon which is described as,

> It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and
> forever, so infinitesimal is its progress, like a shabby bead upon
> the mild red string of road. So much is this so that in the watching of
> it the eye loses it as sight and sense drowsily merge and blend, like the road
> itself, with all the peaceful and monotonous changes between
> darkness and day, like already measured thread being
> rewound onto a spool (5-6).

And as Lena nears Jefferson, she comments "My, my...here I aint been on the road but four weeks, and now I am in Jefferson already. My, my. A body does get around" (26). Because Lena is symbolic of cyclical time, she reappears at the close of the novel, again in a wagon, uttering "My, my. A body does get around. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee" (480). The twinning of these two similar images of Lena with her humourously placid utterance is a sarcastic reminder that, natural time, as represented in Lena, still contrived to unfold oblivious to the upheavals which had occurred in Jefferson.

As Francois L. Pitavy in "A Stylistic Approach to Light In August" writes, "Hightower's life, too, is in the form of a circle, that of self-centeredness and alienation from the rest of humanity, that of his ivory tower" (196). For Hightower, as with

Christmas, his life is circumscribed into the pattern of an eternal circle. From childhood, his reality and perception has been shaped by "phantoms who loomed heroic and tremendous against a background of thunder and smoke and torn flags" (444). His life revolves around the death of his grandfather in the American Civil War so that the present is submerged in the past. For Hightower, the past is the present and hence the future which springs from the present is also the past. All he can comprehend is "the shouts, the shots, the shouting of triumph and terror, the drumming hooves, the trees uprearing against that red glare as though fixed too in terror, the sharp gables of houses like the jagged edge of the exploding and ultimate earth" (458). His grandfather's death becomes a significant icon fixed in Hightower's memory, much like the icons on the Keatsian urn. For example, Hightower joins the seminary believing that, "it seemed to him that he could see his future, his life, intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase, where the spirit could be born anew sheltered from the harsh gale of living" (453). Thus, he subjugates his religion to the formative influence of his grandfather's death so that "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" (56). Hightower enslaves his marriage to the past as well, forfeiting his wife's sanity. For example, the town believes that "if Hightower had just been a more dependable kind of man, the kind of man a minister should be instead of being born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in-that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse-she would have been all right too" (57). The town "would look at him and wonder if he even knew that she was not there, if he had not even forgot that he ever had a wife, up there in the pulpit with his hands flying around him and the dogma he

was supposed to preach all full of galloping cavalry and defeat and glory" (57). For Hightower, his grandfather's death has molded him into a figure on the Keatsian urn. Hightower is like the wooing lover on the Keatsian urn, forever gazing upon his grandfather's death, or the priest endlessly offering a sacrifice to his ideal god, transfixed in an eternal posture of mesmerized supplication.

After Joe Christmas' death, Hightower experiences a moment of revelation. In his soul-searching reverie, the circle is again used as a symbol. For example, Hightower realizes,

> And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife...the debaucher and murderer of my grandson's wife, since I could neither let my grandson live or die (465).

In the aftermath of this epiphany, "The wheel, released, seems to rush on with a long sighing sound. He sits motionless in its aftermath, in his cooling sweat, while the sweat pours and pours. The wheel whirls on. It is going fast and smooth now, because it is freed now of burden" (465). Francois Pitavy, in his analysis of imagery in Light In August, posits that the use of circular imagery to delineate Hightower's revelation indicates that he has freed himself from the past. Pitavy writes,

> ...the wheel of his vision is an appropriate image for the revolution, in the physical sense of the word, that completes his experience in the novel. That wheel is the wheel of torture, for he is wounded and his sweat no longer suggests tears but blood; it is also the wheel of thought which finally runs free, liberated by his painful confession from the braking weight of a dead life (196).

Darrel Abel, in his article, "Frozen Movement in Light In August", where he analyzes Light In August's images and characters, seconds Pitavy's position. Abel writes that "Purged by his abandonment of delusion, his admission of truth, he enters his paradise, his moment of perception of an eternal truth" (44). However, I would argue that Hightower's moment of perception is fleeting and short-lived for again "He hears above his heart the thunder increase, myriad and drumming. Like a long sighing of wind in trees it begins, then they sweep into sight, borne now upon a cloud of phantom dust" (466). Even though Hightower is momentarily resuscitated by the birth of Lena's child, and half-heartedly tries to protect Joe Christmas from Percy Grimm, he is never able to break free of the imprisoning confines of his perception of the past. Hightower is left forever chasing his visions of past glory, left as the lover on the Keatsian urn's frieze is left forever gazing at his desired one. He is excluded from the "wheel" of life so that "it seems to him that he still hears them: the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves" (467). Hightower is thus a figure placed in opposition to Lena's fecundity and promise of fruition.

Hightower's character is thematically connected to the theme of hearth, home, and family established in Go Down, Moses. Just as Hightower repudiates his wife and the promise of growth and maturation through family and marriage, so does Ike repudiate his wife in the face of his overwhelming need to "cleanse" himself of his tainted patrimony. As well, the portrayal of both characters implicitly comments on the sterility of the figures of the Keatsian urn. For example, in "Delta Autumn", Ike interprets himself as a figure against a frieze, seeing

> ...himself and his wife juxtaposed in their turn against that same land, that same wrong and shame from whose regret and grief

> he would at least save and free his son and, saving and freeing his son, lost him (351)

Ike "had had a wife and lived with her and lost her" (352). Similarly, Hightower realizes, "Perhaps in the moment when I revealed to her not only the depth of my hunger but the fact that never and never would she have any part in the assauging of it; perhaps at that moment I became her seducer and her murderer, author and instrument of her shame and death" (462). Ike and Hightower throw into relief the figure of Lucas in Go Down, Moses who repudiates his obsession with finding hidden treasure. Instead, he acknowledges the effect it has had on his wife, his son-in-law and daughter and decides that he does not want a divorce. Light In August, as with Go Down, Moses seems initially to stress that the acknowledgment of the comforts of hearth and home, and believing in the riches of marriage and offspring is one of the means for breaking out of cyclical time. However, this conclusion, I would assert, in light of the portrayal of Joe Christmas and Lena, is superficial. The advent of Percy Grimm, whose face has "that serene, unearthly luminousness of angels in church windows", interjects a note of horrified doubt in the solution of investing in the future (437).

In its meditation on John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn", Light In August examines the impact of different modes of time on perception and the effect society has on the development of language and temporal meaning. Society defines temporal constructs and then instills these constructs through language in its members. However, it is man who must reconcile his own spiritual language with the language of society. Light In August's portrayal of the theme of man, society and concepts of time indicate that this reconciliation is an arduous and agonizing task that ultimately crushes any concepts of meaning that do not agree with society's. This conclusion projects a troubling vision of the future where Keatsian ideals have no place.

Chapter 5:

As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses, and Light In August:

A Future Filled With Doubt and The Resilience of The Human Spirit

William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August form a triptych which portrays a society riddled with an endemic lack of perception that exacerbates a pervasive sense of loneliness, frustration and confusion. This portrayal contains the resounding message that the romantic, pastoral ideals of Beauty, Truth, Honour and Courage as represented by John Keats' "Ode On A Grecian Urn" are no longer attainable by traditional methods or meanings such as artistic or temporal transcendence. Characters, such as Hightower and Ike underscore the message that clinging to the past and the ideals of the past in order to lend significance to the present and the future is an empty solution. However, without such immutable truths to aspire to, the nagging question which follows in the face of such a loss is whether there is anything or anyone to aspire to and to lend guidance. The new world that the novels postulate in answer to such uncertainty is a horrifying one. This new age is led by men such as Percy Grimm, cutting a swathe through those who would disturb the social infrastructure. Such men, then, are the gods who will lead society into the future and give guidance to the lost and the lonely, who will alleviate the pain of living.

Yet, through characters such as Joe Christmas who do struggle and rage against their fate, however inarticulately, Faulkner also applauds the strength of the human spirit. It is in the human spirit that timeless truths are to be found and not in art alone for it is the spirit of the artist which imbues art with a sense of timelessness. The solution to the

future lies within the spirit of man and not in an external god such as a hunt, a bear or an urn. Memory's function is not to mire itself in the past but to remember and recognize the struggles of the soul and to articulate this struggle in language which will then reflect the self, not society. Thus it is that Addie, who perceives her self clearly, is more alive than those who actually are alive and so achieves immortality. This belief is enunciated Faulkner's 1950 Nobel Prize Address where he proclaims,

> I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail. He is immortal, not because he alone among creatures has an inexhaustible voice, but because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance. The poet's, the writer's, duty is to write about these things. It is his privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past (724).

William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, Go Down, Moses and Light In August are a celebration of the human spirit's ability to exemplify eternal ideals such as honour and courage and, ultimately, to endure and prevail .

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