1976

The Endless Journey: William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying and John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath: A Comparative Study

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THE ENDLESS JOURNEY
WILLIAM FAULKNER'S AS I LAY DYING
and
JOHN STEINBECK'S THE GRAPES OF WRATH
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

(TITLE)

BY

SHERRI L. LAWRENCE

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1976

YEAR

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"What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning."

T. S. Eliot
"Little Gidding"

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INTRODUCTION

One's first impression may be that William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying and John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath are incongruous works for a comparative study. That is what I would have thought until I read the two novels consecutively. I was struck by the number of similarities that could provide the basis for an interesting comparison. Each book is about a poor rural family, made up of the parents, a pregnant sister "surrounded by a gang of brothers," and young children, on an arduous journey encountering many obstacles along the way. Each has an episodic plot structure consisting of a series of adventures or misadventures that would not be linked if they were not steps in the journey. Many similar themes are dealt with in the two books: for example, isolation, death, sin, childbearing, and the family unit. Both Faulkner and, to a lesser extent, Steinbeck use an unconventional structure: As I Lay Dying is made up of fifty-nine interior monologues passed around among fifteen characters, while The Grapes of Wrath has panoramic inter-chapters interspersed among the narrative chapters. The endings of each book are left open and point back to the beginnings.

But the final effect of the novels is entirely different. Upon finishing The Grapes of Wrath, one feels serious, sympathetic and thoughtful towards the Joads, who are on the verge of survival with no home, no food, no money, and no jobs in the face of the coming winter. Rose of Sharon's baby has just been born dead and the family is cold and breaking apart. They have not accomplished their original goal of the

journey, which was to find jobs, get a "little white house in among the orange trees," and above all, keep the family together. Despite these despairing conditions, the book ends on a life-affirming note. One feels that the Joads have learned something as a result of their strenuous journey. The main lesson they've learned is that they must move outside of personal concerns, even for the immediate family unit, to help anyone who needs it.

In contrast, the Bundrens of As I Lay Dying accomplish the main goal of their journey, which was to bury the mother, Addie Bundren, in the Jefferson cemetery forty miles away. They suffer through flood waters, fire, the summer heat, circling buzzards, ridicule, the sacrificing of beloved possessions and other hardships in order to complete the burial journey. But at the end, one feels it has all been for nothing. Once Addie is lowered into the ground, no one, except perhaps the perceptive, sensitive son, Darl, who is immediately thrown into an insane asylum, thinks of her again. Instead, they mindlessly munch bananas, while Anse, grinning with his new teeth, introduces a duck-shaped, pop-eyed woman as the new Mrs. Bundren. The reader is left feeling as if a cruel joke has been played on him.

The main point of this paper is to explore some of the aspects that As I Lay Dying and The Grapes of Wrath have in common and to attempt to discover why the two novels affect a reader quite differently. The basic reason is not the material of the two books, but how each author handles his material. Steinbeck's and Faulkner's narrative techniques are directly responsible for much of the difference. Steinbeck always watches his characters from the third-person point of view while Faulkner

gets inside of his characters' minds and perceives from the inside out. There is much authorial intrusion in The Grapes of Wrath and almost none in As I Lay Dying. Steinbeck will usually consider only one side of an issue while Faulkner will delve into its complexities. Steinbeck treats his material in a serious, straightforward manner. Faulkner's works are full of incongruous juxtapositions that result in a complicated mixture of humor and horror, the grotesque and the sympathetic, the comic and the tragic.

Originally , I hoped that the two novels could be dealt with on an equal basis. But upon subsequent re-readings and further study, it became more and more apparent that The Grapes of Wrath is by far a lesser work of art. It never even approaches the degree of fine writing and keen subtlety that can be found in abundance in As I Lay Dying. As Edmund Wilson observed, Steinbeck's novels represent almost the exact line between good and bad art.[1] The Grapes of Wrath and As I Lay Dying supply the grounds to explore the often tenuous and ambiguous distinctions between mediocre and great achievement in literature.

[1] B. R. McElderry, Jr. "The Grapes of Wrath and Modern Critical Theory," A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath (New York, 1968), p. 132.

I. THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH

A comparison between Faulkner and Steinbeck may seem strange, but consider some of the essays presented in Tetsumaro Hayashi's Steinbeck's Literary Dimension: A Guide to Comparative Studies.[1] Here, Steinbeck is compared with Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, Nikos Kazantzakis, D. H. Lawrence, Daniel Mainwaring, John Milton, J. D. Salinger, Adlai Stevenson, Robert Penn Warren and Emile Zola.

There have also been some unusual comparisons made with As I Lay Dying: Mary Jane Dickerson deals with the similarities and differences between As I Lay Dying and T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland,[2] and Richard Bridgman is concerned with the influence Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter had on Faulkner's novel.[3] A less surprising comparison has been made by Harry M. Campbell between As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury.[4]

There are advantages to the comparative approach. Closely studying two works together can yield "reciprocal illumination." Hayashi thinks that we can understand more about both authors and their work than could be conveyed by a single equal-length study devoted to each.[5] Andreas Poulakidas, in his study of Steinbeck and Nikos Kazantzakis, feels that the comparative approach is a way to transcend "the egotistic logic of the new critics who anesthetize the work itself and then start dissecting. The third party presence of another author can diminish the destructive dominance of the critic.[6] Thus, using the comparative approach, "the critic in the dark hopes to produce a new and greater light by rubbing the two matched authors together."[7]

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION I

[1]Tetsumaro Hayashi, ed., Steinbeck's Literary Dimension: A Guide to Comparative Studies (Metuchen, N. J., 1973),pp. 16-179.

[2]Mary Jane Dickerson, "As I Lay Dying and The Wasteland: Some Relationships," Mississippi Quarterly, XVII (Summer, 1964), pp. 129-135.

[3]Richard Bridgman, "As Hester Prynne Lay Dying," English Language Notes, II (June 1965), pp. 294-296.

[4]Harry M. Campbell, "Experiment and Achievement: As I Lay Dying and The Sound and the Fury," Sewanee Review, LI (April, 1943), pp. 305-320.

[5]Tetsumaro Hayashi, ed., A Review of Book-Length Studies (1939-1973) (Muncie, Indiana, 1974), p. 42.

[6]Ibid., p. 41.

[7]Ibid.

II. THE JOURNEY--FROM BEGINNING TO END AND BACK

One of the most apparent similarities between As I Lay Dying and The Grapes of Wrath is that they both have an episodic plot structure that is based on the "journey" or "search" motif. This is a very old and simple structural divice which can be traced from Homer's Odyssey to Pilgrim's Progress to Joyce's Ulysses. It is well suited to both novels. The Joads and the Bundrens move along their journeys from place to place, encounter obstacles, and have adventures almost as if they were characters in a picaresque novel.

The Grapes of Wrath basically divides into three sections: Oklahoma, the trip west, and California. The first section includes background material on the drought, the takeover of the banks and "big business," the "tractoring off of croppers," the return of Tom Joad from prison, and the preparations for the journey west. Following the first section, there are two inter-chapters. The first gives a final picture of the deserted land. The second introduces Highway 66 which will be the central unifying element in the second major section which deals with what happens along that highway to the Joads and the thousands of other families who are heading west to the promised land of California. Grampa dies before the Joads reach the Oklahoma border, and here the Wilsons join them. Chapter 18 ends with "And the truck rolled down the mountain and into the great valley." The next inter-chapter introduces labor conditions in California.

The last part of the book deals with the poor working and living

conditions the Joads find in California. There isn't enough work for everyone, and when there is a job, so many people show up that the wages go way down. The Joads can hardly make enough money to eat each day. They experience first hand the filth of the "Hoovervilles" and what it means to be an "Okie." They next stay for a while at a government camp which at least is clean and where the people govern themselves. But when there is no more work there, they must move on. The climax or turning point is the strike-breaking episode in which Jim Casy is killed, and Tom is converted to Casy's philosophy that "I know now a fella ain't no good alone."[1] Tom kills Casy's murderer and must go into hiding until he decides to leave and dedicate himself to the cause of The People. Meanwhile, the family lives in half of a boxcar and tries to make enough money to eat on. Then the rains come and the river starts to flood. Rose of Sharon goes into labor, so Pa tries to get everyone working together to build a wall to keep the water from coming into their area. But the wall breaks and the water floods their truck and begins to creep into the boxcar. Rose of Sharon's baby is born dead, so the family starts out walking to look for dry ground. In the final scene, they find a barn where there is a starving man whom Rose of Sharon must nurse back to life.

This ending has been criticized as being sentimental and inconclusive. But the open-ending indicates that the journey and the search will go on.

Eric Carlson says that an ending must suggest continuance of life--thus the end must be a statement of beginning.[2] The Grapes of Wrath begins and ends by picturing the destructive power which elements of nature can have over the lives of men. In the beginning, it is the drought and the heat of the sun that force the Joads to give up their land, and in the

end, it is the flood waters that force them to move from their boxcar home. In both situations, there is the image of the women watching their men closely to see if they have broken at last. Both times the women sigh with relief that "the break had not come; and the break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath."[3]

The Joads have not broken yet despite the terrible situation at the end of the novel. They are homeless, penniless, sick, and hungry, but the reader is left with an affirmative hope for them. This is because of Steinbeck's fundamental faith in mankind. He shows the Joads as having learned, as a result of their struggles along their journey, about the need of each person to help one another. Rose of Sharon's actions in the final scene indicate that the brotherhood which Casy had earlier predicted, is on its way.

Like The Grapes of Wrath, As I Lay Dying also has an episodic plot structure that follows the journey pattern. It is built on a series of events rather than one outstanding climax. Addie's death, the preparation and departure, the crossing of Tull's bridge, the burning of Gillespie's barn and the arrival in Jefferson are the major sections of the book. These events are narrated basically in their chronological order. The point of narration is passed around the circle of characters and each monologue advances the action of the journey a little further. The plot follows the pattern of a downward spiral. The movement is downward because most of the characters are worse off at the end of the book than when they started out: Cash's gangrenous broken leg gets worse in his cement cast; Jewel loses his horse and gets burned in the fire; Dewey Dell is seduced by a drugstore clerk, Anse steals her abortion money, and she is still pregnant;

Darl goes mad, is betrayed by his family, and is sent to an insane asylum; and Vardaman doesn't even get to see the train that Dewey Dell promised would be there. Anse is only one to come out ahead with his teeth and new wife.

As in The Grapes of Wrath, the end points back to the beginning. There was a Mrs. Bundren at the start of the novel, she dies, and there's a new one at the end. But as André Bleikasten points out, this substitution is like a usurpation. The pop-eyed, duck-shaped new Mrs. Bundren is only Addie's grotesque understudy. The whole journey is a process of degradation, symbolized by the increasingly repulsive smell of the rotting corpse.[4]

When the reader comes to the ending, after he has suffered with the Bundrens through their difficult journey, he is not sure whether to laugh or cry. Perhaps doing both would be more appropriate. He wants to shake the Bundrens and say, "Haven't you learned anything?" But they all seem to be at the level of minimal thought as they munch their bananas. None ask if there is any meaning to what they've been through. This task is left up to the reader.

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION II

[1]John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York, 1966), p. 570.

[2]Eric Carlson, "Symbolism in The Grapes of Wrath," A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath, ed. Agnes McNeill Donohue (New York, 1966), pp. 100-1.

[3]Steinbeck, p. 592.

[4]André Bleikasten, Faulkner's As I Lay Dying (Bloomington, Indiana, 1974), p. 49.

III. CRITICAL EVALUATIONS

Considering Faulkner and Steinbeck together brings up many issues that are at the heart of literary criticism, for example, the relationships between art and sociology, idea and character, form and content, among others. Critical attitudes towards these issues are reflected in Faulkner's and Steinbeck's literary reputations.

William Faulkner now has an established position as one of the outstanding novelists of the first half of this century. Many articles echo Robert Penn Warren's sentiments on Faulkner's talent: Faulkner has a wide range of effect, philosophical weight, originality of style, variety of characterization, comic and tragic intensity that are unequaled in twentieth century America.[1]

All of these talents are brought together in As I Lay Dying. Ronald Sutherland, like the majority of critics, is full of high praise:

> Further distinguished by aesthetic concentration, mastery of technique, and significance of theme, containing what appear to be the principle elements of his vision of life, As I Lay Dying is surely one of William Faulkner's most fundamental achievements.[2] It is perhaps the closest he came to artistic perfection.

Since most critics start out with the assumption that As I Lay Dying is a very well written work of art, they can move on to discussing aesthetic particulars such as Faulkner's style, narrative technique, character, theme, symbolism, and use of humor.

With Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, however, there has been much debate as to whether it is even art at all, or merely propaganda parading as art.

This controversy has gone on for years and is still not settled. The negative side asserts that The Grapes of Wrath is too flawed to command serious attention; the materials are local and temporary, not universal and permanent; the conception of life is overly simple; the characters are sallow and flat; the structure is weak--the non-organic editorializing inter-chapters force unearned general conclusions and the ending is inconclusive as well as overwrought and sentimental. The positive side feels that The Grapes of Wrath is a great novel. The conception is philosophical; the characters are warmly felt and deeply created; the language is functional and varied; and the structure is a harmonious combination of the dramatic and the general.[3]

As Joseph Henry Jackson observed: "Those who have written about Steinbeck have disagreed far more widely--and deeply--than they have about any other important writer of our time."[4]

While the critics did not wholly embrace Steinbeck, the average American of the 1930's certainly did. The Grapes of Wrath was the top best-seller and Steinbeck was America's favorite literary son in 1939. With regard to popularity, Steinbeck hit the right subject at the right time. Americans during the years of the depression favored sympathetic portrayals of the dispossessed and affirmative statements about The People. One of the consequences of this "timeliness" was that The Grapes of Wrath was judged in terms of its sociological content. Its "facts" were discussed, not its art.

The subject of The Grapes of Wrath had been growing in Steinbeck's mind for some time. He had written a series of stories for the San Francisco News based on his observations of the conditions in squatters'

camps in California. He visited the dustbowls of Oklahoma and travelled west with some of the migrants. By this time, he was outraged enough to write a burning pamphlet called Their Blood Is Strong. This sociological tract includes descriptions and incidents that later became incorporated in The Grapes of Wrath.

It is evident that the ideas behind The Grapes of Wrath preceded the novel's aesthetic and formal considerations. Steinbeck wanted to do something about the injustices of the migrant worker's situation in the "real" world as well as in the realm of literature. In contrast, Faulkner seems to have stayed aloof from the social-historical happenings around him. The Bundrens seem to exist outside of the everyday world without a past or a future.

Cleanth Brooks points out that Faulkner is not portraying a quaintly horrifying Southern folkway. Few if any families in rural Mississippi would have attempted to do what the Bundrens did.[5] This is shown by the reactions of the non-Bundren characters in As I Lay Dying. They are shocked: Lula Armstid says, "It's an outrage," and Samson's comment is, "You've got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that's been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can. But they wouldn't do it."

The Bundrens seem oblivious to what the rest of the world thinks. They don't care or maybe don't even know what is the proper thing to do with regard to culture, tradition, or social customs. The Bundrens seem timeless and "placeless."

In The Grapes of Wrath, the social setting of class conflict in Oklahoma and California during the depression of the nineteen-thirties plays a very important role. Of cource, it must be granted that it

would be impossible to write any novel about the "Okies" without being somewhat sociological. Just the fact that Steinbeck is writing about something timely and topical does not render it invalid as art. More important is how he handles his material and how obtrusive his "ideas" are.

At times it seems as if they are laid on top rather than being an integral part of the narrative. His philosophical ideas are mostly expounded in the inter-chapters that attempt to generalize and universalize the story of the Joads. But often he only succeeds in sounding "schoolmasterish" and abstract. Steinbeck sometimes seems to be hovering over the reader's shoulder explaining, interpreting, and telling him what to think. This authorial intrusion gets in the way of any vital, personal involvement with the novel. This ultimately results in frustration and discontent for the reader.

Frederick J. Hoffman feels that Steinbeck's strategy involves "some of the most wretched violations of aesthetic taste observable in modern American fiction," and that a study of the style, rhetoric and intellectual content of the inter-chapters reveals Steinbeck's writing at its worst and his mind at its most confused.[6]

One of the many examples of this kind of "wretched violation" is such a passage as

> And this you can know--fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for the one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.[7]

These abstract ideas do not grow organically out of the novel's narrative. Steinbeck is attempting to hand out a ready-made conclusion which the reader has had no part in making.

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION III

[1]Robert Penn Warren, "William Faulkner," Modern American Fiction: Essays in Criticism, ed. A. Walton Litz (New York, 1963), p. 150.

[2]Ronald Sutherland, "As I Lay Dying: A Faulkner Microcosm," Queen's Quarterly, LXXIII (Winter, 1966), p. 549.

[3]Howard Levant, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study (Columbia, Missouri, 1974), pp. 93-4.

[4]Joseph Henry Jackson, The Short Stories of John Steinbeck (New York, 1953), pp. vii-viii.

[5]Cleanth Brooks, William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country (New Haven, Conn., 1966), p. 142.

[6]Frederick J. Hoffman, The Modern Novel in American: 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1951), p. 152.

[7]Steinbeck, p. 205.

IV. CHARACTERIZATION VS. "IDEA-LIZATION"

One of the biggest differences between Steinbeck and Faulkner lies in their attitudes towards the role of "ideas" in fiction. For Steinbeck, ideas are often the starting point of his work and are readily apparent throughout his novels. Faulkner, however, claims that the point of genesis or the "germ" of his stories is never an idea: "The story can come from an anecdote, it can come from a character. With me it never comes from an idea because I don't know too much about ideas and ain't really interested in ideas. I'm interested in people."[1]

Faulkner believes that conveying a message or idea is mutually exclusive of creating "flesh and blood people that will stand up and cast a shadow." He doesn't think "any writer is capable of doing both, that he's got to choose one of the two: either he is delivering a message or he's trying to create flesh-and-blood, living, suffering, anguishing human beings."[2]

Steinbeck's feelings about the role of ideas is quite different. He wrote in a journal he kept while writing East of Eden:

> I have noticed so many of the reviews of my work show a fear and a hatred of ideas and speculations. It seems to be true that people can only take parables fully clothed with flesh.[3]

The Grapes of Wrath reflects this attitude. The characters are generally flat and unindividualized.* They lack the "flesh" that Faulkner

*In fairness to Steinbeck, it should be suggested here that perhaps he didn't want his characters to be individualized because the group-concept was more important. The individual should merge into the family of man.

feels is a necessary element of "living," believable characters. The roles the Joads play in Steinbeck's philosophical scheme prescribe their personalities. Even Ma Joad, who is one of the most fully developed characters in the novel, is idealized:

> Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and superhuman understanding.... It was her habit to build up laughter out of inadequate materials. But better than joy was calm. Imperturbability could be depended upon. And from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess.[4]

Steinbeck makes Ma the embodiment of such abstract concepts as tragedy, pain, suffering, understanding, joy, calm, imperturbability, dignity, and beauty. But intangible ideas are not what make a "flesh-and-blood character.

All of the Joads go from being concerned mainly with themselves or the family to embracing mankind in general. They undergo this change without the intermediate steps ofbelievable character development. Rose of Sharon seems to change overnight from a whining, immature girl to an understanding earth-mother who "smiles mysteriously" while she succors dying men.

In the very first scene that we meet him, Tom Joad is lashing out at the truck driver who is giving him a ride: "Nothin' ain't none of your affair except skinnin' this here bull-bitch along, an' that's the least thing you work at." He's only concerned with "laying his dogs down one day at a time" and satisfying his personal pleasures. He tells his brother Al, "The day I come outa McAlester I was smokin'. I run me down

a girl, a hoor girl, like she was a rabbit.... I sure did pick a nice time to get paroled. I figgered I was gonna lay aroun' an' get up late an' eat a lot when I come home. I was goin' out an' dance, an' I was gonna go tom-cattin'--an' here I ain't had time to do none of them things."[5] The last time we see him, he's getting ready to go out to fight and die for The People. To explain why he is going he quotes the Bible to his mother: "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lif' up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up."[6]

Tom seems to be pushed into this role in order to illustrate the point that men should help one another and be part of one large family. It is times like this that the characters seem to fade into mere mouthpieces, as the author's voice comes through, like another station on the radio.[7]

Howard Levant has observed in his book The Novels of John Steinbeck that the Joads are each given a specific tag--Granma's religion, Grampa's vigor, Uncle John's melancholy, Al's love of cars and girls. Ma, Pa, Rose of Sharon, and Tom carry the narrative so their personalities are defined by events; Ma is the psychological and moral center of the family; Pa carries its burdens; Rose of Sharon means to insure its physical continuity; and Tom becomes its moral conscience.[8]

This kind of "tagging" makes them "not quite real," as Edmund Wilson wrote in one of the most sweeping condemnations of The Grapes of Wrath:

> In spite of Mr. Steinbeck's attempts to make them [the Okies] figure as heroic human symbols, one cannot help feeling that they, too, do not quite exist seriously for him as people. It is as if human sentiments and speeched had been assigned to a flock of lemmings on the way to throw themselves into the sea.[9]

Steinbeck's narrative technique is in part responsible for the characters' flatness. The Joads are revealed through the dramatic telling of their struggles or through authorial comments in the inter-chapters. The third person point of view is used so the characters are always seen from the outside. George Bluestone noticed that "even at moments of highest tension, Steinbeck scrupulously avoids getting inside the minds of his people."[10] Not only does Steinbeck stay on the outside, he tends to show only one side of a character or issue. He sentimentally portrays the Joads as simple, kind-hearted poor-folk. In each chapter, Steinbeck hints at their essential goodness. His overflowing compassion blinds him to the fact that part of the Okie's problem might be due to their ignorance. In this biased presentation, the characters can be only half-truths. The Grapes of Wrath would have been more universal if it had shown the issue of the migrant laborers as being multifaceted. Some of the sharp drama and tragedy might have been lost, but the ambiguity of how life really is would have been truer. Instead Steinbeck oversimplifies the issue into the migrants vs. the enemy, i. e., the banks, tractors, California land owners, and the people driving the big cars on Highway 66. We never get to see the Okies from the viewpoint of the other side, for example, that of the citizens of California who are frightened by the rush of desperate migrants willing to do anything for their next meal. These Californians want the same things the Joads desire: food, family, home, jobs, and security.

There is no objective viewpoint in The Grapes of Wrath that shows the story of "the other side." We always see from the perspective of the Okies' or rather from Steinbeck's perspective of the Okies' perspective. Through this continual closeness to the Joads' view of their experiences,

Steinbeck tries to make them sympathetic, almost tragic characters.

Steinbeck's narrative technique turns on him. Ironically, his overzealous attempt to favorably portray the Okies distances the reader from the characters and the philosophical issues of the novel. Since Steinbeck shows only one side of the story, his characters remain flat and undeveloped. Since it is hard for a reader to identify with and get personally involved with such a character, he feels detached. This detachment is further augmented by the reader's ever-present sense that Steinbeck is nearby waiting to slip in a hint or comment. Thornton Wilder in Our Town increases his readers' objectivity by having his narrator break in upon a scene to say "Thank you, ladies." This is what happens when Steinbeck speaks directly to his audience as he does in the following passage.

> This you may say of man--when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when narrow dark alleys of thought national, religious, economic, grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back. This you may say and know it and know it.[11]

This one of the many examples of authorial intrusion in The Grapes of Wrath where Steinbeck takes time out to have a heart-to-heart chat with his readers to make sure they are not missing any of his ideas.

In contrast to The Grapes of Wrath, As I Lay Dying has no authorial intervention. Faulkner lets the characters tell the story. Fifty-nine interior monologues are passed around among fifteen characters. Each monologue moves the action of the plot forward, reveals the inner self of the speaker, and comments on the other characters and what is happening. The thoughts of both major and minor characters, which corresponds to the Bundrens and the non-Bundrens, are presented. This is an unusual

technique that has only been used in a few other works, as for example, in Virginia Woolf's The Waves. The locus of narration moves from person to person with each adding new impressions and insights.

Many of the complexities and subtleties of As I Lay Dying are due to the narrative technique. The reader gets inside each character's mind for a while and perceives from the inside out. He sees how the world looks and feels to the character rather than how it looks to the author or how it should look to the reader. Faulkner attempts to transcribe the workings of Dewey Dell's mind at the pre-verbal level as she watches to see if her family will turn to go to the New Hope cemetery.

> The signboard comes in sight. It is looking out at the road now. Because it can wait. New Hope. 3 mi. it will say. New Hope. 3 mi. New Hope. 3 mi. And then the road will begin, curving away into the trees, empty with waiting, saying New Hope. 3 miles.
>
> I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It's not that I wouldn't and will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon.
>
> Now it begins to say it. New Hope three miles. New Hope three miles. That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events.... It blows cool out of the pines, a sad steady sound. New Hope. Was 3 mi. Was 3 mi. I believe in God.I believe in God. [12]

Here the narration moves along simultaneously with the action. This gives the reader a much greater sense of immediacy and involvement. Impressions are shot at him so rapidly sometimes he doesn't have much time to piece the fragments together and interpret their meanings. But this is often how the characters are feeling. Dewey Dell's world is changing "too soon" for her to get a grasp on her life.

"Stream of consciousness" is a narrative form which shows a character not as a fixed state, but as a process of endless "becoming." This

technique is well suited to As I Lay Dying because as Joseph Reed says, "Becoming" is the subject of the book. The change that takes place between beginning and end is far less important than the multiple continuing experience in the middle--because the narrative design determines that it will be so.[13]

Faulkner tries to bring us close to Vardaman's fluctuating raw consciousness:

> The walk is harder than sitting on the ground. He is in the open door. He looks at me. "You want something?" he says. His head is slick. Jewel's head is slick sometimes. Cash's head is not slick. Darl he went to Jackson my brother Darl In the street he ate a banana. Wouldn't you rather have bananas? Dewey Dell said. You wait till Christmas. It'll be there then. Then you can see it. So we are going to have some bananas. We are going to have a bag full, me and Dewey Dell. He locks the door. Dewey Dell is inside. The light winks out.[14]

The reader gets Vardaman's thoughts as he thinks them and the actions of other characters, for example, Dewey Dell going into the basement with the drugstore clerk, as they occur. All fifty-nine monologues attempt to capture this sense of immediacy. The sections combine to present a picture somewhat like a cubist painting or a multiple-exposure photograph. Addie's death, the burial journey, and the members of the Bundren family are seen from many perspectives. Sometimes there are widely varying responses to the same set of events or characters, as with the reactions to the complex chararacters of Darl and Addie. Darl is the most articulate Bundren and narrates nearly a third of the time. Since the reader is closer to his consciousness than to that of any of the other characters, he adopts Darl as his guide. This creates a perhaps unwarranted sympathy for him.

In his own monologues, Darl seems very intelligent and sensitive.

He is perceptive to the point of clairvoyance and knows instinctively of Dewey Dell's pregnancy and Addie's affair with Whitfield. The language of his sections is often philosophical and poetic; his thoughts are full of digressions and free associations. But this side of Darl's character is only revealed to the reader. Darl rarely speaks to others and when he does he is very curt and impersonal. Armstid describes his manner of speech as "He said it just like he was reading it outen the paper."[15]

The only times Darl does anything for anyone else are when he brings Cash's tools into Armstid's house and when he stops the fight between Jewel and the man with a knife in Jefferson. Everyone considers Darl to be very strange. His own father doesn't understand him:

> We hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl begun to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat with Cash, with his dead ma laying in her coffin at his feet, laughing. How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him, I don't know.[16]

Vernon Tull, a neighbor, says of Darl, "He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of his that makes folks talk."[17] Vernon's wife Cora says, "It was Darl, the one that folks says is queer, lazy, pottering about the house no better than Anse."[18] This is a very different view of him than what the reader gets through Darl's own sensitive, poetic monologues.

As with Darl, there are discrepancies between Addie's outward appearance and her inner self. Outwardly she seems to fulfill her role of wife and mother. Cora Tull says of her own cakes, "they turned out real nice, but not like the cakes Addie used to bake.... There's not a woman in this section could ever bake with Addie Bundren."[19]

Anse feels that Addie has been a good wife for him and says of her, "She was ever one to clean up after herself."[20]

Cora tells Addie, "Just because you have been a faithful wife is no sign that there is no sin in your heart."[21]

It is not until two-thirds of the way through the book that we hear Addie's own thoughts. Here we learn that Addie is quite different from the image of the loving wife and mother which everyone has of her. When she taught school she couldn't wait until she could go down to the spring and "be quiet and hate them." She would whip the children to mark their blood with her own. She also has strong feelings about her children. Cash and Jewel were of "her alone," but of the rest she says: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine."[22] This is her way of "cleaning up her house."

In Addie's monologue we learn that she is not the faithful wife Cora thinks she is. She once had an affair with Reverend Whitfield because it made "the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin."[23] Darl is the only one who knows of Addie's affair. Consequently he feels that Jewel, the resulting child of the illicit union, has a mother but he does not. He says, "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother."[24] Darl's acute awareness of Addie's emotional rejection of him leads him to feel very unstable of his identity. Vardaman asks him,

> "Then what is your ma, Darl?"
> "I haven't got ere one," Darl said. Because if I had one, it is <u>was</u>. And if it is was, it cant be <u>is</u>. Can it?"

"No," I said.
"But you are, Darl," I said.
"I know it," Darl said. "That's why I am not is. Are is too many for one woman to foal." [25]

The reader's view of Addie is a composite picture of her family's feelings about her, the neighbors' observations, and Addie's own self-revelations.

Faulkner's narrative methods are well suited to presenting: Addie's inner conflicts over the issues of living and dying, words and deeds, isolation and violation, and her loved and unloved children; Darl's rambling poetic consciousness; Dewey Dell's rapidly changing world; Vardaman's confusion over his mother's death; and the intricate relationships within the Bundren family.

In The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner was able to get inside of his characters' heads by having each of the three Compson sons speak through a long interior monologue. In As I Lay Dying, he has mastered his technique even further. He has expanded his cast of characters to fifteen and divided their monologues into fifty-nine fragments. Doing this provides many chances for juxtapositions and contrasts.

We get to see the Bundrens both through their own eyes and through those of observers outside the family without ever compromising first-person narrative immediacy. We are continually drawn in and out of the Bundrens' experiences. When we see the Bundrens through the outsiders' distanced perspective, their journey becomes comic and often macabre. Some incidents border on the grotesque, such as Vardaman boring holes into Addie's face to help her breathe. But in the Bundrens' sections we are drawn back into their point of view, and we share their tragedies with them. We feel Dewey Dell's pregnancy, Vardaman's confusion, Jewel's

sacrifice of his horse, and Darl's isolation.

In The Grapes of Wrath, only one perspective is presented, that of Steinbeck himself. In As I Lay Dying, the reader must strike a balance between the viewpoints of the eight non-Bundrens and the seven Bundrens by adding his own perspective. Through these many different colored lenses, a multi-colored strain filters out.

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION IV

[1]Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., Faulkner in the University of Virginia, 1957-1958 (New York, 1965), p. 19.

[2]Ibid., p. 47.

[3]Robert Murray Davis, "Introduction," Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert Murray Davis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.,1972), pp. 4-5.

[4]Steinbeck, p. 100.

[5]Ibid., pp. 233,239.

[6]Ibid., p. 570.

[7]Christopher Isherwood, "The Tragedy of Eldorado," A Casebook on The Grapes of Wrath, ed. Agnes McNeill Donohue (New York, 1968), p. 79.

[8]Howard Levant, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study (Columbia, Missouri, 1974), pp. 93-4.

[9]Warren French, ed., A Companion to The Grapes of Wrath (New York, 1964), p. 193.

[10]George Bluestone, "The Grapes of Wrath," Steinbeck: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Robert Murray Davis (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1972), p. 116.

[11]Steinbeck, pp. 204-5.

[12]William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying (New York, 1957), pp. 114-16.

[13]Joseph W. Reed, Faulkner's Narrative (New Haven, Conn., 1973), p. 94.

[14]Faulkner, pp. 240-1.

[15]Ibid., p. 181.

[16]Ibid., p. 99.

[17]Ibid., p. 119.

[18]Ibid., p. 23.

[19]Ibid., p. 8.

[20] Ibid., p. 20.

[21] Ibid., p. 159.

[22] Ibid., p. 168.

[23] Ibid., p. 166.

[24] Ibid., p. 89.

[25] Ibid., p. 95.

V. TREATMENT OF THEME

Steinbeck and Faulkner treat their themes in much the same way they handle characterization. Steinbeck will usually oversimplify and generalize while Faulkner will delve into an issue's complexities. Steinbeck stays on the outside and only shows one side while Faulkner goes into the inside and explores a theme from many angles. Steinbeck will often use abstractions while Faulkner will use concrete images. Steinbeck will work directly to have a reader feel an emotion by telling him what he should be feeling while Faulkner will work indirectly by having the reader feel the emotion himself through images, language, rhythm, and symbols. The different ways the two authors handle similar themes can be shown by comparing the following passages describing Rose of Sharon's and Dewey Dell's pregnancies.

> Rose of Sharon was pregnant and careful. Her hair, braided and wrapped around her head, made an ash blond crown. Her soft round face, which had been voluptuous and inviting a few months ago, had already put on the barrier of pregnancy, the self-sufficient smile, the knowing perfection-look; and her plump body--full soft breasts and stomach, hard hips and buttocks that had swung so freely and provocatively as to invite slapping and stroking--her whole body had become demure and serious. Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. She balanced on her toes now, for the baby's sake. And the world was pregnant to her; she thought only in terms of reproduction and of motherhood.[1]

> I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible.... The cow nuzzles at me, moaning. You'll have to wait, even if you are a woman too.... The cow breathes upon my hips and back, her breath warm, sweet, stertorous, moaning. The sky lies flat down the slope, upon the secret clumps. Beyond the hill sheet-lightening stains dead earth. It lies dead and warm upon me, touching me naked through my clothes.... I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth.[2]

Dewey Dell's passage is much more vivid, earthy, and fecund. The moaning cow, the slopes, the secret clumps, and the wet seed in the hot earth are effective objective correlatives that transmit how Dewey Dell is feeling without becoming sentimental. Rose of Sharon's sense of child-bearing, on the other hand, is idealized and flat. Steinbeck uses abstract works like "pregnancy," "reproduction," and "motherhood" that remain mere concepts on paper. Rose of Sharon and Dewey Dell are both feeling "the world is pregnant." Steinbeck tells the reader just that, but Faulkner shows how the cow, sky, hills, air, and hot earth are all as organic and life-bearing as Dewey Dell.

Steinbeck deals with the theme of isolation in the same way. The reader is told Uncle John is the "lonest goddamn man in the world."[3] and that "nearly all the time the barrier of loneliness cut Uncle John off from people and from appetites."[4] Just as he did with Rose of Sharon's pregnancy, Steinbeck oversimplifies the issue and uses abstract words such as "loneliness." He implies that Uncle John's isolation is solely due to the time years ago when his young wife had an appendicitis attack. He said it was just a stomach-ache so when she died the next day he felt it was his fault. He hasn't been able to forget it since or do anything that didn't feel like it was "part sin." Steinbeck tells us, "The death of his wife, followed by months of being alone, had marked him with guilt and shame and had left an unbreaking loneliness on him."[5] Granted, guilt over his wife's death might be enough to make him the "lonest goddamn man in the world" but Steinbeck should show us this, not simply tell us.

Steinbeck's answer to isolation is to lose oneself in concern for others. Such a solution is too simple for the complex, isolated individuals of the Bundren family. Darl doubts his very existence:

> I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not.... And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was, Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And I must be or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is.[6]

Darl's isolation from his family and life is enough to cause him to go mad. He is detached even when Dewey Dell and Jewel and the men from the insane asylum are fighting with him. Cash describes how "it was like he was outside of it too, same as you, and getting mad at it would be kind of like getting mad at a mud puddle that splashed you when you stepped in it."[7]

Darl even becomes so detached that he speaks of himself from the third-person point of view. In his last monologue, he says of himself, "Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl is in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams. 'Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes.'"[8]

Addie too, is sharply aware of her "aloneness" and wants it violated. This was why she would whip her pupils:

> When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever.... And only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights.[9]

Another way Addie tried to violate her aloneness was to go behind empty words and their full meaning by fulfilling "her duty to the alive, to the terrible blood." One of the words she chose to enact was "sin." By choosing Reverend Whitfield for her lover it made

> the sin more terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify the sin He had created. While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin. I would think of him as thinking of me as dressed also in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. I would think of sin as garments we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air.[10]

In contrast to the usual meaning of the sin as the way to damnation, which is how the pious Cora Tull would define it, sin for Addie can be a way to salvation. Jewel, the product of Addie's sin, does fulfill her prophecy: "He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me."[11]

Steinbeck also deals with the theme of sin, but only in a cursory manner. Jim Casy is troubled by having sexual impulses as a preacher and begins to question what sin really is. He tells Tom,

> Maybe it ain't a sin. Maybe it's just the way folks is. Maybe we been whippin' hell out of ourselves for nothin'.... To hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say.[12]

The categories "nice" and "not nice" are not adequate for discussing the topic of sin.

Steinbeck does a little better on the theme of death. Again Casy is Steinbeck's mouthpiece as he says a few words over Grampa's grave:

> This here ol' man jus' lived a life an' jus' died out of it. I don' know whether he was good or bad, but that don't matter much. He was alive, an' that's what matters. An' now he's dead, an' that don't matter. Heard a fella tell a poem one time, an' he says 'All that lives is holy.' Got to thinkin', and an' purty soon it means more than the words says. An' I wouldn' pray for a ol' fella that's dead. He is awright. He got a job to do, but it's all laid out for 'im an' there's on'y one way to do it. But us, we got a job to so, an' they's a thousan' ways, an' we don' know which one to take. An' if I was to pray, ti'd be for the folks that don' know which way to turn. Grampa here, he got the easy straight. An' now cover 'im up and let 'im get to his work.[13]

Grampa's death does not affect any of the Joads very deeply. Noah says, "Funny thing is--losin' Grampa ain't made me feel no different than I done before. I ain't no sadder than I was."[14] Even Ma Joad treats it lightly: "Grampa—it's like he's dead a year."[15]

In contrast, the Bundrens' reactions to Addie's death are varied and complex. Vardaman, the youngest child, is very confused by his mother's death. He tries to understand it in his pre-logical mind. If only he can explain it in some concrete way, his world won't be shattered. First he places the blame on Dr. Peabody since Addie is alive before the doctor comes and dies shortly after he arrives. Vardaman takes his revenge out on Dr. Peabody's horses by scaring them away. Next he associates Addie with a big fish he has caught. One of the most striking "chapters" of the book is Vardaman's surrealistic statement: "My mother is a fish." He makes this association because Addie was alive when the fish was living and when Addie died, the fish became not-fish. Finally he persuades himself that she simply went away and someone else took her place.

> It was not her. I was there, looking. I say. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away. "Did she go as far as town?" "She went further than town." [16]

Dewey Dell's secret motive for going to Jefferson is to get an abortion. This has led many critics to say that Dewey Dell is unaffected by Addie's death. This is not really true. Dewey Dell sat for ten days fanning her mother's body. The moment Addie dies, Dewey Dell cries out,

> "Ma!" Then she flings herself across Addie Bundren's knees clutching her, shaking her with the furious strength of the young before sprawling across the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left, jarring the whole bed into a chattering sibilance of mattress shucks, her arms outflung and the fan in one hand still beating with expiring breath into the quilt.[17]

André Bleikasten thinks that Dewey Dell feels her mother's death very intensely because it occurs at a time when she needs her more than ever.[18] In whom could she confide her secret if not her mother? She feels doubly betrayed. Her lover has seduced her and left her and her mother is no longer there to help her. She feels isolated, and everything--her first sexual experience, her pregnancy, her mother's death--comes to her too soon.

The inter-relationship between life and death is an important theme in both novels. Throughout The Grapes of Wrath, the emphasis is on the living. When Granma dies, Ma Joad doesn't tell anyone and lies all night with her body in the back of the truck so the family can get across the desert. She explains to the rest later, "I was afraid we wouldn' get acrost. I tol' Granma we couldn' he'p her, tol' her when she was a-dyin'. We couldn' stop in the desert. There was the young ones--and Rosasharn's baby."[19] The idea that life is more important

is symbolized by Rose of Sharon's gesture in the last scene where she uses the milk that was intended for dead baby to give life to a dying man.

Dr. Peabody in As I Lay Dying says that death is not just a phenomenon of the body but " merely a function of the mind--and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of the tenement or a town."[20] For Dr. Peabody, the significance of death is how it affects the living. He tries to tell this to Dewey Dell right after her mother has died, "I would not let it grieve me, now.... Vardaman's getting big now, and with you to take care of them all. I would try not to let it grieve me. I expect you'd better go and get some supper ready. It don't have to be much. But they'll need to eat."[21] As usual, Faulkner enriches his material with twists of irony. Dr. Peabody is concerned that Dewey Dell might be overcome with grief when she doesn't have time to grieve precisely because she is concentrating on the living, i. e., the new life in her belly. It is also ironic that Dewey Dell is using a journey whose public ~~public~~ purpose is getting rid of the dead for her private purpose of getting rid of this new life.

Hyatt H. Waggoner says the structural metaphor in As I Lay Dying is a journey through life to death and through death to life.[22]* This journey is circular and endless.

*Elizabeth Kerr adds that the return to a narrow, impoverished, and fruitless life gives an ironic twist to the cycle.[23]

FOOTNOTES TO SECTION V

[1]Steinbeck, pp. 129-30.

[2]Faulkner, pp. 59-61.

[3]Steinbeck, p. 91.

[4]Ibid., p. 130.

[5]Ibid., p. 131.

[6]Faulkner, p. 76.

[7]Ibid., p. 227.

[8]Ibid., p. 244.

[9]Ibid., pp. 162-4.

[10]Ibid., pp. 166-7.

[11]Ibid., p. 168.

[12]Steinbeck. pp. 31-2.

[13]Ibid., pp. 196-7.

[14]Ibid., p. 199.

[15]Ibid., p. 203.

[16]Faulkner, p. 63.

[17]Ibid., pp. 47-8.

[18]Bleikasten, p. 94.

[19]Steinbeck, p. 311.

[20]Faulkner, pp. 42-3.

[21]Ibid., p. 50.

[22]Elizabeth Kerr, "As I Lay Dying as Ironic Quest," William Faulkner, Four Decades of Criticism, ed. Linda W. Wagner (East Lansing, 1973), p. 242.

[23]Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The Bundrens and the Joads sacrifice and suffer much along their seemingly endless journeys. In both novels, there is the material of personal tragedy. The tone the two authors adopt towards this material is one of the keys to why As I Lay Dying and The Grapes of Wrath affect a reader quite differently. Faulkner creates complex comic effects out of his subject matter while Steinbeck's tone towards his is very solemn and straightforward. At times Steinbeck's seriousness is excessive. The Joad's plight is handled with such earnestness that sometimes it borders on idealization and sentimentality. Leonard Lutwack in his book Heroic Fiction: The Epic Tradition and American Novels of the Twentieth Century feels that Steinbeck commits the prime error of many writers who attempt the epic: he lifts the Joads and the Okies too quickly and abruptly from their realistic existence to the level of epic heroism.[1]

Rose of Sharon changes from a whining girl to a loving earth-mother; Tom goes from an easy-going ex-convict to a Bible-quoting, dedicated disciple of Jim Casy, who is first a lusty "preacher-rogue" and then a martyr for the cause of The People. These conversions are not quite believable.

Faulkner, on the other hand, takes the Bundrens' tragedies and gives them a comic twist. Jewel heroically risks his life in the flood and fire scenes and sacrifices his beloved horse so that the

journey can go on. Lying above the rotting corpse, Cash suffers without complaining, while his broken leg turns black. The Bundrens "endure" through the many misfortunes that occur on their difficult journey. But the elements of heroism and tragedy are undermined by the disparity between the characters' public and private motives for going to Jefferson. The Bundrens pretend to be seriously carrying out their promise to Addie, but they have personal reasons too. Anse wants some new teeth, Cash wants a gramophone, Dewey Dell wants an abortion, Vardaman wants to see the train in the shop window, and they all want bananas. Darl and Jewel are the only ones without a personal motive unless it is as Barbara Giles suggests, "the simple but powerful wish of poor rural folk to go to town."[2] This gap between public and private motives produces a comic effect that almost negates the tragedies the Bundrens have suffered.

The comic often achieves its effect by incongruous juxtaposition. In As I Lay Dying there are many incongruities. Humor and horror, the serious and the grotesque, the sympathetic and the ludicrous are laid side by side. The reader alternates between feelings of ridicule and respect for the Bundrens. Faulkner will interlace a passage of high pathos with one of a farcical tone. The following description of Anse Bundren immediately after Addie has died. At first Anse seems genuinely humble with grief and deserving of sympathy. The language of the first part of the paragraph causes the reader to move slowly, thoughtfully, and respectfully through the words and images. But the last selfish sentence slaps him in the face.

> Pa stands over the bed, dangle-armed, humped, motionless. He raises his hand to his head, scouring his hair, listening to the saw. He comes nearer and rubs his hand, palm and back, on his thigh and lays it on her face and then on the hump of quilt as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he had made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity, so that at last he desists, his hand falling to his side and stroking itself again, palm and back, on his thigh. The sound of the saw snores steadily into the room. Pa breathes with a quiet rasping sound, mouthing the snuff against his gums. "God's will be done," he says. "Now I can get them teeth.[3]

If Faulkner had left off the last sentence, his description of Anse would have approached the "tragic" tone of the following passage from The Grapes of Wrath:

> In the wet hay of leaking barns babies were born to women who panted with pneumonia. And old people curled up in corners and died that way, so that the coroners could not straighten them. At night the frantic men walked boldly to hen roosts and carried off the squawking chickens. If they were shot at, they did not run, but splashed sullenly away; and if they were hit, they sank tiredly in the mud.
>
> The rain stopped. On the fields the water stood, reflecting the gray sky, and the land whispered with moving water. And the men came out of the barns, out of the sheds. They squatted on their hams and looked out over the flooded land. And they were silent. And sometimes they talked very quietly.[4]

Comedy and tragedy differ not so much by virtue of the incidents dealt with but by the perspective taken towards them. Steinbeck treats his material in a straightforward, humanistic manner while Faulkner chooses to mix his perspectives into a complex but rich combination of the absurd and the serious and makes his readers watch along with him "the sane and the insane doings of the man with the same horror and the same astonishment."[5]

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1]Leonard Lutwack, Heroic Fiction: The Epic Tradition and American Novels of the Twentieth Century (Carbondale, Illinois, 1971), p. 50.

[2]Kerr, p. 232.

[3]Faulkner, p. 51.

[4]Steinbeck, p. 592.

[5]Faulkner, p. 228.

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