

**The Sound and the Fury
in the
Garden of Eden**

**William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*
and the
Garden of Eden Myth**

John P. Anderson

*The Sound and the Fury in the Garden of Eden: William
Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and the Garden of Eden Myth*

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spawned this book

Listen to Hebrew Scripture

Eating you shall eat

Dying you shall die

Listen to Luther

I say die . . . taste death as though it were present

Protocol and Debts

This book is about the Garden of Eden myth in the Book of Genesis and how William Faulkner used the myth to shape his novel *The Sound and the Fury*.

First I go through the Garden of Eden myth to set the stage. I had so much fun doing this part that this discussion extends well beyond the boundaries of the application to Faulkner's novel. You will find that a close reading of the myth as literature brings a new result.

Then I show how Faulkner used a similar reading of the myth in the structure and content of his powerful novel. Most of this effort takes the form of a detailed exploration of its four sections.

For ease of reading, the Garden of Eden myth, the title of the novel and its author are sometimes abbreviated as Garden myth, the SF and WF. Page numbers are to the Modern Library corrected text. Material within square brackets [...] is my editorial comment within quoted material. Slashes / have added to some of the quoted material to make it easier to understand.

A full text of the Garden of Eden myth is attached as Appendix A. In presenting Hebrew words used in the Garden myth, I have omitted marks above the letters since my machine does not make them.

The following analysis of the Garden myth is heavily indebted to the treatment by E. J. van Wolde in *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2-3* and to Hebrew scholar Rabbi Bernard Lipnick.

The material about the “eternal return” outlook versus the personal and independent outlook is based on Marcea Elide’s *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and Robert Cahill’s *The Gifts of the Jews*. The material about the “J” author is based on Harold Bloom’s *The Book of J*. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes in the section Garden Myth-Details Author are from Bloom. He is one of America’s preeminent literary critics and Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University. The material on human consciousness is indebted to Julian Jaynes’ *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. This is in my view one of the most provocative books written in the 20th century.

References to the unexpurgated version of biblical materials are to the additional material left out of the Hebrew Scriptures but contained in the more inclusive legends of the Jews (Ginzburg, *The Legends of the Jews*).

In understanding Faulkner’s novel, I made extensive use of *The Ink of Melancholy* by Bleikasten and *Reading Faulkner The Sound And the Fury* by Noble and Polk. The Garden of Eden symbology has been noted before. However, the analysis of the detailed extension of the Garden myth as a structuring device for this novel is, as far as I know and for better or worse, of my own making.

The Sound and the Fury in the Garden of Eden

Pink Slip to Dirty Drawers

William Faulkner's fourth novel *The Sound and the Fury* started the creative outpouring that earned for him the Nobel Prize for Literature. He earned the Prize for "powerful and artistically unique contributions to the American novel." His first contribution was the radically new form of his fourth novel. This new form was conceived from a pink slip and dirty drawers.

The pink slip came to his third novel *Flags in the Dust*. An optimistic Faulkner had submitted it to Boni and Liveright, the publishers of his first two and fairly conventional books *Soldiers Pay* and *Mosquitoes*. While he had already experienced conflict between writing for commercial publication and writing for himself, he had great expectations for *Flags*. He could hardly wait for the publisher's reply. At this point, he was still innocent in the writing game.

The pink slip dated November 25, 1927 from his publisher read as follows:

". . . Soldier's Pay was a very fine book and should have done better. Then Mosquitoes wasn't quite as good, showed little development in your spiritual growth and I think none in your art of writing. Now comes Flags in the Dust and we're frankly very much disappointed by it."

The publishers were not just disappointed with his third effort. They were disappointed with him as a human and as an artist. They thought the third book was so bad that Faulkner should not submit it for publication at all. They felt its publication would erode his chances for commercial success with later books. Talk about a bad report card, particularly for a 30-year-old writer.

Shocked and depressed, Faulkner felt like a “parent who is told that its child is a thief or an idiot or a leper.” His innocence lost, he reacted with the courage that over the years would create revolutionary new modes for the novel. He didn’t sell out and write for commercial success. He decided instead to write his next novel for himself and for art, to write for the right reasons:

“One day I seemed to shut a door between me and all publishers’ addresses and book lists. I said to myself, Now I can write. Now I can just write.”

Freed of commercial constraints, he started what became *The Sound and the Fury* without a plan as a purely personal adventure in writing. In the fresh air of independence, inspiration came easily from his creative unconscious. It came from the Garden of Eden myth, the first story of the loss of innocence. It came in the form of muddy drawers on a courageous little girl. Faulkner provided, many years later, a detailed explanation of his original artistic inspiration for this book:

I saw that they [one sister Caddy age 7 and three brothers Quentin, Jason and Benjy ages 10, 6 and 5] had been sent to the pasture to spend the afternoon to get them away from the house during the grandmother's funeral in order

that the three brothers . . . could look up at the muddy seat of Caddy's drawers as she climbed the tree to look in the window at the funeral, **without then realising the symbology of the soiled drawers**, for here again hers was the courage which was to face later with honor the shame which she was to engender, which Quentin and Jason could not face: the one taking refuge in suicide, the other in vindictive rage. [emphasis added]

The center of this inspiration is a courageous little girl with dirty drawers. Faulkner named her Candace or Caddy. As her name suggests, she is willing to break the rules and roll the dice. By contrast, her brothers play it safe and remain sterile and fixed. The risk taker Caddy incarnated Faulkner's courage in proceeding with art not commerce. The commercial alternatives that he refused to take became her sterile brothers. Thus the pink slip became the dirty drawers and Faulkner had his start for a powerful novel.

When his original inspiration came "to mind," Faulkner recognized the courageous little girl with dirty drawers as offspring of Eve from the Garden of Eden myth. Eve's experience with the serpent and the knowledge of death had become the children's first look at soiled drawers and a funeral. Faulkner extended the Garden of Eden connection to all of the novel.

The Garden of Eden myth was the perfect framework for Faulkner because the myth is about the human struggle for independence and individuality and the forces that restrict those achievements. This is exactly what he was going through as a writer. Since the subject matter was born of his own intense experience, he could give the novel great power.

With freedom, the perfect framework and the power of personal experience, Faulkner wrote with great desire that carried him into ecstasy:

That other quality which *The Sound and the Fury* had given me. . . : that emotion definite and physical and yet nebulous to describe: that ecstasy, that eager and joyous faith and anticipation of surprise which the yet unmarred sheet beneath my hand held inviolate and unfailing, waiting for release.

Just preparing to write, contemplating the blank page, gave Faulkner those most precious of human experiences: vitality, ecstasy and expectation of surprise. These describe the human experience of acting out of the center of one's individuality. It is as close to paradise as one can get. In the human condition, this is Easter, not accidentally the day on which this novel ends.

This is how Faulkner came to write a story about a family, the Compson family, and the striving of Compson children for independence as the path to individuality. They strive within a base of family dependency. Intensified by the self-indulgence of their parents, that base turns out to be a very sticky tar baby, particularly for the Compson sons. The daughters, successors to Eve, make it through the passage of loss of innocence to independence, but the sons, successors to Adam, don't.

Garden Myth—Summary

What is it about the Garden of Eden myth that has fascinated generation after generation of artists and writers? How can it still speak to us today, after thousands of years?

The Garden myth in the Book of Genesis (2:4 to 3:24) has been taught in Sunday school on the basis of a superficial and biased reading, as the story of sin and bad disobedience justly punished by God. You don't have to be a Marxist to realize that reading is in the interests of control.

To an unbiased and in-depth literary reading, however, the myth is about increasing human awareness, a positive biological development. The myth describes a fundamental change in the human condition from an innocent and predetermined or instinctive animal condition to an increased awareness of self and free will. The myth telescopes into one lightning quick change what must have happened historically on a gradual basis over a long period of time. In the myth, the fruit of the tree of knowledge turns out to be fast food indeed.

The main point of the myth is that the change is only halfway, that it leaves serious problems resulting from a mixture of self and animal. The principal problem of the mixture is the fear of death. This fear, a product of the remaining instinctive animal nature, limits the possibilities of freedom, the product of the awareness of self and free will. While religion describes the results in terms of sin, the myth never refers to sin but instead describes the results in what we refer to as psychological terms—in terms of the attitude toward God, between man and woman and towards life.

God is posited in the myth as the universe of all possibilities. Artistically this is represented by the combination of fruit from the two special trees in the Garden, the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. The humans eat from the prohibited knowledge tree but not from the freely available tree of life. This brings them only halfway on the way to divinity, full divinity being the combination of knowledge and freedom with

immortality. The semi-divine humans achieve the power of knowledge and freedom but are restrained by mortality.

God distorts the expression of independence by Eve by creating the desire for forbidden fruit. God seems to channel the human expression of freedom by His prohibition on eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge. God does not create a similar prohibition with respect to the tree of life, and the humans are never interested while they are in the Garden. God seems to precondition the result of the Garden experience by the use of a “thou shalt not.”

As predicted by God in the memorable line “Dying you shall die,” the result of eating just the knowledge tree fruit is awareness and fear of death. Dying (the fear of death) you shall die (a kind of death in life). The death in life resulting from fear of death is a restriction on life possibilities for the humans. Their freedom is not complete. They become only semi-divine because they do not open themselves to all possibilities. In current psychological terms, we would say that the fear of death must be repressed to achieve equanimity and that this like any repression leads to illusion and restricted possibilities of living. In new age terms, you can’t live out of your center if it is full of repressions.

The myth uses only a few characters—God, a curious creature, a woman, a man, and a serpent. The man and woman are commonly referred to as Adam and Eve, but those names are not used in the myth. The names used in the myth change several times, and changes in the names signal changes in their human experience.

The woman is a mover and shaker. The man is a passive follower. God has a one strike rule, violate my rule once and out you go, out of the Garden of paradise. The serpent is a symbol of the desire built in to the human condition. With these few characters, a limited stage set and in a few pages, the author

creates a powerful myth about the human condition and the relationship of humans to the cosmic powers that be.

This myth was probably composed originally around 1000 BCE. My favorite scholarly guess about the author, known as “J” because of the use of Jahweh for god, is Harold Bloom’s—that the author was a female member of the royal court of Judah after the death of David and Solomon. In any event, whoever the author was, the poetry of the myth is of the highest order. The author is an elitist who believes that the divine in humans is manifested in the fullness of personality, in risk takers who seek new possibilities.

Coded into the plot of the Garden myth are competitive worldviews or cultural outlooks as to the human experience. The competitors are an older “eternal return” outlook based in tradition and group and a newer outlook based in freedom and individuality. The older outlook was generally in charge in the fertile crescent in the second millennium (2000 to 1000 BCE). It shapes the experience of the humans in the Garden in the first part of the myth, when God is in charge and the humans follow the rules. The newer cultural outlook is a gift of the Jews. It shapes the latter parts of the Garden myth, when the humans break the rules reaching for independent significance and in the process experience a new relationship with death.

In the Garden, the experiences of sex and death register most graphically the effects of increasing awareness and increasing personal orientation. The meaning of sex and death changes fundamentally in the shift from God to self and in the shift from tradition and group to freedom and individuality.

The Garden of Eden myth continues to speak to us even after thousands of years because it still describes the human condition. Each individual human continues to experience the same change in awareness particularly about sex and death in his

or her own development. This change occurs in adolescence, in the shift from innocence and family to experience and individuality. Adolescence, sex and death are the breeding grounds for Faulkner's novel.

Garden Myth and *The Sound and the Fury*—Summary

Both the Garden myth and Faulkner's novel are literature of limitation. Both focus on forces that limit human possibilities. Both feature sex and death as the screens that best show the effect of these forces. As with *God in the Garden*, the Compson parents' limited and conditional love for their children distorts the avenues for the expression of courage and independence by the children. Thou shall surely not or we won't love you results in the very behavior sought to be prohibited. Forbidden fruit is the fruit eaten.

Faulkner used the Garden of Eden myth to shape the characters for this novel. In Faulkner, the characters are the principal structuring device. His characters always feed the action, not the other way around. Here his characters are made from the soil of the Garden myth, a story that itself featured a great cast.

If you interpret the Garden myth in terms of the human experience, what you have for characters are a potent restless daughter, an impotent follower son, a single parent giving conditional love and a slippery seducer. Faulkner uses the same general set of characters in this novel. The Compson daughters are potent sexually and break the rules on their way out of town to new possibilities. The Compson sons are impotent sexually, followers, and in one way or another remain at home emotionally and physically. The Compson parents give only conditional love. The seducers are legion.

Compson daughter Caddy is WF's Eve. She has the new cultural outlook, the bold and courageous pursuit of individuality

through independence. Like Eve, Caddy breaks the rules. Eve learned about death as she ate the prohibited fruit from the tree of knowledge. Innocent Caddy learns about death for the first time as she climbs the prohibited pear tree in the family yard. As Eve was seduced by the slippery serpent, Caddy loses her innocence to her first seducer Dalton Ames, who comes to her in the cedars in the skins of a snake. Like Eve expelled from the Garden, pregnant Caddy has to leave home.

The Compson sons, on the other hand, continue to share the dependent aspects of the older tradition-based cultural outlook. As Adam just passively repeated Eve's eating of the prohibited fruit, the Compson sons are impotent in terms of life possibilities because of their sister. They grow up in her potent and restless force field. They do not have emotional protection from their parents because their parents are too absorbed in themselves. The sons are traumatized by their sister's experiences, experiences that produce emotions that they can't control. The resulting psychological damage leaves them with limited human possibilities, particularly in regards to connections with the opposite sex.

As in the Garden myth, dependence in Faulkner results from conditional love by parents, reliance on traditions and fear of the new. At the highest level of generalization, WF pairs independence and dependence with courage and repetition. Independence and courage produce more new possibilities in life and dependence and repetition produce less. For WF, repetition is the antithesis of life, which he finds in courage to create new possibilities, especially in a life certain to end in death. In this novel, Eve's courage belongs to the Compson daughters and Adam's repetition forecloses the Compson sons.

Garden Myth—Details

Let us take a detailed look at the Garden myth since most of us last encountered it in Sunday School. There we were given a highly propagandistic version of this subtle artistic creation. In interpreting the myth, I use a literary analysis, a type of analysis that attempts to be true only to the entire text and is free to use tools that were explicated later, such as by Freud. So let us proceed with literary analysis to the tale of two trees.

Author

The current scholarly consensus refers to the author of the Garden myth as the “J” author, since god in the myth is referred to as Jahweh (or just to be confusing Yahweh). Let’s call the author J.

Harold Bloom’s guess is that the J author was a woman serving at the royal court after the death of David and Solomon at about 1000 BCE and that she wrote the Garden of Eden material as part of a larger group of stories. Scholarly consensus holds that hundreds of years later, the J material was edited and blended by the “Redactor” author with other sources into a composite that was originally the Hebrew Scriptures and became the Old Testament.

J used the Garden myth as well as other stories to promote her outlook based on the consciousness of freedom. But this is one promoter who doesn’t pull any punches. In the Garden myth she presents the problems as well as the glories of the new attitude of freedom and separation. J also has a gender agenda. The true heroes in her stories are women.

J writes in Hebrew with comic irony and incessantly employs word play, puns, etymologies and sound associations. Most of this is lost in translation, and I try to give you some of the

flavor. She is the master of elliptical writing, the use of sparse means to suggest and leave room for reader participation through interpretation. Often she communicates meaning by what is not said. This is not lost in translation.

The viewpoint of the J author is individual. Today she would be called an elitist. To her, the divine element in humans is registered in the wholeness of being and magnified vitality of the individual personality. This required a capacity, indeed a thirst, for change and new possibilities. Her stories are of “restless interactions.” Her heroes are “pioneers of the self.” J’s Jahweh god is uncanny, full of surprises and “restless dynamism.” God is new possibilities.

Eve is the first of J’s heroines. She elects independence in the teeth of God’s limits. Adam remains impotent and just repeats her actions. She is a mover and a shaker. He is a follower. A sensitive and avid reader of the Old Testament, Faulkner converted this stark contrast of Eve and Adam to the equally stark contrast between the Compson daughters and sons.

Eternal Return to the Modern Outlook

Coded into the Garden myth is a shift in cultural outlook. A full understanding of this shift gives a deeper appreciation of the myth.

A cultural outlook controls what matters, what is considered important. For example, the prevailing cultural outlook in the U.S. at the present time is personal subjectivity and materialism. Individuality even to the point of self-indulgence is considered sacred and the pursuit of material wealth is the thing to do. These are givens for most people in our culture.

The shift registered in the Garden myth is away from an older cultural outlook based on tradition and group. It featured

repetition and cycles, and is totally foreign to us now. Tradition was important and the new was frowned on.

This older outlook gave us reincarnation in the dimension of human life. Reincarnation is the recycling of old souls in new bodies. Reincarnation did not promote the sacredness of each individual; each person was not really different but only an ancestor retread. Humans were supposed to be humble. Stay in your place. You are the group, the old group. The meaning of life was in the eternal and the group.

This older outlook was named the “eternal return” by Marcea Eliade, the premier historian of religion in the 20th Century. The name eternal return was fitting because of the reliance on cycles and reincarnation, always returning and always returning to something very old.

Eliade offered convincing evidence that this traditional eternal return outlook characterized most “archaic” societies, such as those in the second millennium (2000 to 1000 BCE) in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran and India. This was the competing cultural worldview against which the Garden myth was composed, probably about 1000 BCE.

This traditional outlook was crucial in human experience. It determined the meaning of sex and death. Sex and death are returns to a comforting unity. Sex is for procreation as divine creation made the world. This survives in the official view of the Roman Catholic Church. Death is not final since souls are enduring and reincarnated. The Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell are versions of this attitude, since souls are parked awaiting the final judgment.

In this traditional outlook, all behavior considered sacred is aimed at a repetition of the original events, the archetypes, contained in the patterns of divine creation. Merger with the divine is the ultimate objective. Repetition is the main tool. The aim is to

participate in what is perceived to be real, which is characterized as being formed and enduring.

The contrast in this traditional outlook is with events that are characterized by becoming rather than fixed and enduring. Becoming events are considered profane. The serpent symbolized profane becoming since the serpent always sheds its skin, is always in the process of becoming. Profanity is epitomized by chaos, a condition in which there is no form and no endurance. Water is used as a symbol for this unformed condition. It is a fitting symbol since water itself has no inherent form. It takes the form of its container.

Experience under the traditional eternal return outlook is considered to be a repetition of events. There is no real history since all experience is cyclical. Everything has happened before and will happen again. All is repetition and nothing is new.

Plato gave the ultimate expression of this view in the metaphysical realm. In his formulation reality consists of repetition through specific examples in our world of timeless and immobile “forms” that exist in a divine plane of reality. To use the famous example, each specific horse on earth participates in the immutable and divine “form” for horse. An analog of the form for horse reappears at the end of Faulkner’s novel as the equestrian statue of General Compson. It is the symbolic source of the Compson male curse and the repetitive guide to the dead.

For the human participant, the psychological sense produced by the traditional eternal return outlook is integral wholeness and timelessness. Time has no boundaries. Death has few teeth because souls are deemed to survive and return through reincarnation. All important things have a place and a reason. Theocracy not democracy rules. Individual people are not important.

In focus, the particular and concrete gives way to the general and mythical. This is because of the emphasis on repeating divine patterns that are general and vague by their very nature.

The offspring of the traditional eternal return outlook include totemism (individual souls are funded from the collection of ancestor souls), other forms of ancestor worship and in general unquestioning veneration of the old way of doing things, such as in Faulkner's case the conservative attitude in the Old South prior to the Civil War.

The traditional eternal return outlook permeates the first part of the Garden myth. It is the basis for the experience of the humans in that part of the myth, when they obey the rules. Indeed, they enjoy the fruits of this outlook. Faulkner curses the Compson sons with its modern fallout, the inability to change and grow to new possibilities in life.

The shift to the new outlook is registered in the ultimate experience of the humans in the Garden. The new outlook is based on change and new possibilities, not on tradition. It drives the later stages of the Garden myth. Carrying the groceries for the new outlook, Eve breaks the old rules. Compson daughter Caddy carries on for Faulkner.

Eve's shift is to a "modern" outlook based on freedom and difference. This outlook was originally generated by the Jews, one of the many "gifts of the Jews." That such a shift would be registered in the Hebrew Scriptures is not surprising. By the way, I use the term Jewish religion to cover the Hebraic religion both before and after the split of the southern part Judah and the northern Israel.

The shift to the modern outlook must have been revolutionary. The shift comes with the development of personal consciousness and a stronger sense of self. It gave a new sense of

reality through a linear view of history, not cycles, and a shift to the personal in what mattered, a new sense of personal morality.

Sex and death took on new meaning. Sex is based on personal desire for satisfaction, but death is final. Souls are not reincarnated. The meaning of life is personal, cultivation of each person's individuality. New possibilities are sacred and repetition is profane.

This modern cultural outlook leaves humanity with the freedom to strive for independent personal significance against the background of certain and final death. It is based on human freedom, responsibility and personal subjectivity. Individual difference is sacred. Mindless following is profane. The Jews carry the new outlook. They argue more than other groups because each Jew thinks his or her view is important. Their political expression is democracy. Their teacher is the rabbi, who is the same as everyone else, not a priest who is somehow special. Their historical expression is progress, not mindless repetition of cycles.

The bad news in this system is the potential for a sense of alienation and meaninglessness. Self can easily lead to selfishness. The openness to individual development and difference can be coupled with a sense of meaninglessness resulting from an emphasis on self and mortal dependency. If I personally am so important and my individual soul is sacred, why do I die so soon and why do I have to make new ones?

The absurdity of this condition is the background for Faulkner's selection for the title of this novel. He took it from the Shakespeare line "the sound and fury that signify nothing." Meaninglessness characterizes the lives of the three Compson sons. They make no new possibilities for the future, and no children. They have amplified sound and fury in their lives but in the final analysis no reason for being.

Now to the myth itself. It has four phases.

Phases I and II

The traditional eternal return outlook permeates the first two phases of the myth. Timelessness and integral wholeness prevail. Humans obey the rules. The meaning of life is God.

In the **first** of four phases (I GE), God is introduced. I use the pronouns Him, Him/Her and It indiscriminately to refer to God. God is referred to as *YHWH Elohim* (pronounced Ya **whha** Ee low **heem**) for most of the myth. This is translated as YHWH God, a title that means something like the combination of forces of immortality always with you and the forces of creation. Using other words, this god is both transcendent beyond the world and immanent in the world. This is the only time in Genesis that this dual name is used. Prior to this point, that is for the primordial acts of creation over six days, the name *Elohim* has been used. After this point in Genesis, either but not both are used.

Yahweh is in Hebrew a verb form of *haya*, which means the state of being or existence. The verb form suggests an active and dynamic immortal state of being that is always present. It can be translated as any or all of the following: “I am always with you”; “He who is”; and “I will be that I will be.” The first meaning (always with you) suggests the traditional eternal return outlook or a parent who won’t let go. The second two (He who is and I will be what I want) suggest the modern outlook. The humans reflect the god or the god the humans. Which is it? Both?

Elohim can mean either the plural form of god as in many gods or the singular godhead. It suggests the power manifested from whatever source in creation of our time-space continuum. The essence of that continuum is differentiation into things separated in time and space and as to living beings birth and death—becoming, being and dying. Separation and discrimination