

NATURALISM AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN
THE GRAPES OF WRATH, AS I LAY DYING, AND OLD MAN.

Naturalism and the Individual In
The Grapes of Wrath, As I Lay Dying, and Old Man.

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Abstract

Naturalism considers human beings to be determined by their heredity and environment. The individual is at the mercy of determining social and economic forces. John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath is a naturalistic novel that examines the natural laws and social conditions that confront the Joad family in their struggle to survive the Dust Bowl Depression. Steinbeck notes the consequences that the "shining red earth" has on the "weary and discontent" people (The Grapes of Wrath, 1939:124 and 211). The attempt to escape the harsh natural and economic determinism of their homeland also worsens their social condition. The strength of the naturalistic forces transcends the physical state of the characters to penetrate their very "souls [where] the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy" (Grapes 477).

In William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying Addie Bundren is also subject to the determining natural and social forces. The hot, "dead air", combined with the misfortune of marrying an unloving husband, has rendered both communication and love impossible for Addie (As I Lay Dying, 1957:58). She cannot derive strength from her husband since he contributes to her despair. Addie Bundren cannot project herself into a lasting communion with another person and represents an isolated, alienated individual.

The tall convict, in Faulkner's novella Old Man, also

retreats into a regressive condition of alienation from women and life outside the womb-like security of the Parchman Penitentiary. Determined by the natural forces of the flooding waters and the presence of the pregnant female that leaves him "impotent", the tall convict cannot discover the redemptive strength that Jim Casy's human spirit provides (Old Man, 1939:111).

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Per i miei genitori, che mi hanno creato,
e che mi hanno dato una vita piena di valore.

To my family, who is everything
I want to be.

To Michelle, who is everything.

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Introduction

Prior to examining John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, and William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying, and Old Man, in the context of naturalism, it is imperative to establish a literary perspective. Donald Pizer states that there is no single definition of naturalism but a "variable and changing complex set of assumptions about man and fiction" which comprises, what he calls, "a naturalistic tradition" (Pizer 11). What, then, are the complex set of assumptions that are significant for the purposes of this study?

Naturalism is a way of "imagining the world and the relation of the self to the world" (Howard 9). The individual engages in both an external struggle with the environment and an internal conflict with his/her self in relation to his/her natural and social surroundings. Each human being is determined by heredity and environment and "subject to the social and economic forces in the family, the class, and the milieu into which that person is born" (Abrams 153). Lars Ahnebrink, in June Howard's Form and History in American Literary Naturalism, concludes that the naturalist author "portrays life as it is" in accordance with determinism. The naturalist believes that a human being is "fundamentally an animal without free will" (Ahnebrink 36). Naturalistic themes, thus, include an opposition between "human will and

hereditary and environmental determinisms that both shape human beings and frustrate their desires" (Howard 40).

The French novelist Emile Zola was the pioneer in considering human beings to be determined by naturalistic forces beyond their control. For Zola, determinism "governs the stones of the roadway and the brain of man" (Zola 17). Just as heredity is influential in the "intellectual and passionate manifestations" of human beings, so too are the surroundings and social conditions that he/she is a part of (Zola 19-20). It is the responsibility of the novelist, according to Frank Norris' The Responsibility of the Novelist, to depict the "truth" and not mislead the reader by presenting "false views of life" (Norris 11 and 220).

Naturalism, however, is not a solution to the upheaval of traditional literary meanings that emerged in approximately 1900 and continued throughout the First World-War years (1914-1918). Frederic Henry, in Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, is "embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice" since they have become "obscene" as a result of the World War (Hemingway, 1929: 184-185). Naturalism addresses the crises of the meaninglessness of traditional notions of honour, religion, and love. Naturalist authors attempted to redefine meaning and truth in American life during this time of social, cultural, and literary change.

The following study will be divided into three chapters with the focus in each section on one specific aspect of naturalism and how it applies to the three texts under

examination. The first chapter will deal with the naturalistic belief that human beings are "merely a higher order animal whose character and fortune are determined by two kinds of forces--heredity and environment" (Abrams 153). This belief perceives the human being as belonging "entirely in the order of nature, with no participation in a religious or spiritual world beyond nature" (Abrams 153). The second chapter will focus on the aspect of the naturalistic philosophy that emphasizes

...the powerlessness of modern tragic characters and traces their helplessness to social forces, social factors, social pressures and tendencies. (Farrell, "Observations", 150)

The final chapter will examine the potential of the naturalistic novel to both "despair and hope at one and the same time" (Furst 22). More specifically, this section of the project will consider the expression of "an optimistic social purpose" (Walcutt 22).

John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, is a naturalistic novel that examines the natural laws and social conditions that confront the Joad family in their struggle to survive the Dust Bowl Depression. The setting is an active participant in the story. Steinbeck persistently notes the consequences that the "shining red earth" has on the "weary and discontent" people (The Grapes of Wrath, 1939:124 and 211). The attempt to escape the harsh natural and economic determinism of their homeland worsens their social condition too. The people of California despise the "new barbarian" migrants (Grapes 318).

The strength of the naturalistic forces transcends the physical state of the characters to penetrate their very "souls [where] the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy" (Grapes 477). Traditional religion does not redeem the Joads' suffering condition. While exposing the ordeal of their suffering, Steinbeck affirms his theory that the social group is superior to the individual. The emergence of the group concept in the Joads' experiences with the Wilsons, the government camps, and the Wainwrights, provides the desire to endure. The movement towards the group concept is focused on Jim Casy who had "no soul that was his" (Grapes 572). Instead, as an individual within the group, he is part of a collective human spirit. While the group is essential in a quest to survive, individual identity is not lost but strengthened. However, in another sense, Jim Casy (as a Christ-like figure and religious representation) invalidates the naturalistic vision that assumes there is no sovereign God in the world (Timmerman 278).

In Faulkner's As I Lay Dying Addie Bundren is also subject to the determining natural and social forces. The hot, oppressive, "dead air", combined with the misfortune of marrying an unloving husband, has rendered both communication and love impossible for Addie (As I Lay Dying, 1957:58). She cannot derive strength from her husband since he contributes to her despair. Thus, while there is some optimism for Addie, it concerns only herself and not the group. Addie Bundren

cannot project herself into a lasting communion with another person and represents an isolated, alienated individual.

The tall convict, in Faulkner's novella Old Man, also retreats into a regressive condition of alienation from women and life outside the womb-like security of the Parchman Penitentiary. Determined by the natural forces of the flooding waters and the presence of the pregnant female that leaves him "impotent", the tall convict cannot discover the redemptive strength that Jim Casy's human spirit provides (Old Man, 1939:111). The tall convict resigns himself to the fact that he is a victim of the "cosmic joker" who is responsible for his misfortune (Old Man 160). Like Addie Bundren, the tall convict endures an existence of "constricted desolation" (Old Man 133).

The tall convict is a tragic character who is powerless as a result of the social factors that determine him. However, his helplessness is from neither the economic determinism that confronted the Joads, nor from a dysfunctional family that surrounds Addie Bundren. The tall convict is determined to struggle with not only the natural forces of the river, but the burden of the woman who is more disturbing than the flood itself. Consequently, by examining these three novels in the context of naturalism, it is evident that there exists a polarity of the individual. While the characters in all the texts are victims of determining natural and social forces, they do not all manage to transcend their

experience to discover meaning in their despairing environment. The individual characters in The Grapes of Wrath not only endure, but grow stronger within the group. The individual characters in As I Lay Dying and Old Man also endure on account of their somewhat tainted optimism but remain oblivious to the true nature of communication, concern, and ultimately, love between and for people. Addie Bundren and the tall convict cannot develop the same consciousness of the Joad family for the need of collectivism to confront the hardships of the naturalistic forces. While Jim Casy offers a philosophic, somewhat mystical insight into the naturalistic vision that benefits the Joad family, the insights of both Addie and the tall convict remain their own, thereby stifling the development of their character.

Chapter I: The Philosophy of Determinism

The first chapter will examine, in all three novels, the aspect of naturalism that considers mankind to be merely a higher order animal whose character and fortune are determined by heredity and environment, with no participation in a religious world (Abrams 153).

A) The Grapes of Wrath

"It is difficult to see why anyone becomes a farmer or a fisherman. Dreadful things happen to them constantly" (The Log from the Sea of Cortez, 1941:83). In John Steinbeck's novel The Grapes of Wrath, the dreadful things are the naturalistic forces out of control. The Joad family is determined by the harsh conditions of the Dust Bowl Depression that "scarred the earth" and drove them from the Oklahoma farmland (Grapes 3). Frustrated and determined by the natural elements, the Joad family is depicted in terms of mere higher order animals who fail to discover any consolation in traditional religion.

There is no denying that The Grapes of Wrath is indeed a naturalistic novel. "The sun flared down day after day" on the once fertile and abundant farmland, creating a "crusted" and barren surface (Grapes 3). As the strongest symbol of despair, the dust is a constant reminder of the naturalistic elements that determine the plight of these Okie migrants. From the crusted earth emerges a dust that not only covers the

land but is symbolic of the Joad family's trials and tribulations throughout their exodus from Oklahoma to the Promised Land of California. The "dust formed", filled the air, and blanketed all their belongings (Grapes 4). The Okies are unable to make a living from the barren earth and become "dusted out" of their homes (Grapes 12). The dust is a product of the earth, and it is the earth and the environment that determine the Joads' suffering. The dust not only "hangs in the air for a long time", but it never seems to disappear (Grapes 115). There is an interesting contrast between the dust that drives the Joads from Oklahoma, with its connotations of sterility and filth, and the family's expectations of California, with its bountiful oranges and grapes. According to Pa Joad, "ever'thing nice an green, an' little white houses an' oranges growin' aroun'" (Grapes 141). Certainly a refuge from the brown, crusted, dry, and old dust of Oklahoma. In a naturalistic context, then, the Joad family "could not escape" the determining sun and elements (Grapes 159).

In such a context, the human being becomes merely a higher order animal with no control over the naturalistic forces at work. The turtle is a brilliant analogy to man. Like the Joads, the turtle "crawled, turning aside for nothing" and laboured on in its westward journey, just as the Joads migrate westward to California (Grapes 19). Peter Lisca states:

...the indomitable life force that drives the turtle, the toughness that allows it to survive predators and trucks, the efficiency of nature that uses the turtle to unwittingly carry seeds and bury them, are clearly characteristic also of the Joads. (Lisca 97)

Just as the Joads struggle to transport their belongings in a less than adequate vehicle, the turtle also is depicted as "dragging" its belongings, its domed shell over the grass (Grapes 19). Human conduct and animal conduct are set "side by side, on the same plane" (Kennedy 127). Like the Joads, the turtle's efforts become more "frantic" as its obstacles increase (Grapes 20). The turtle, too, is determined to arrive at its destination in search of a more fruitful land. Like the Okies, it is uprooting its homeland and confronting natural laws while anticipating reaping its harvest in the West, as represented by the seed it carries Westward from Oklahoma. Alfred Kazin suggests that Steinbeck's interest in "the animal nature of man leads to oversimplification and a failure to create fully human characters" (Kazin 184). However, to criticize the author for oversimplification is to lose sight of the analogy. Steinbeck is making a comparison that makes explicitly clear man's ineffectiveness in a determined environment. The Joads are exposed to the basic elements and, like animals, are forced to struggle and in the best situation cope in order to survive. Such a comparison makes clear the elemental nature of the Joads' struggle. Furthermore, Steinbeck's analogy of man and animal results in

an extremely realistic portrayal of his characters. The Joads are presented in all their imperfections. The elderly members of the family are deeply rooted in their home and thus die because they are most vulnerable to the sufferings of the "crawl" towards the west. Furthermore, Noah abandons the family, Rose of Sharon suffers for being an idealist and loses a baby, while Connie flees from his responsibility of being a husband and father. Steinbeck is depicting his characters in a determined environment and allows for their instability and imperfections.

In search of fortune, the Okies "clustered like bugs" on the side of the road just as insects do for protection and warmth (Grapes 249). The families could share their lives and become "one family" united in their confrontation with a determined environment" (Grapes 249). Similarly, in his Log, Steinbeck comments on the resolve and "tenacity" of the animals in Cope San Lucas who respond to the force of the great surf (Cortez 58). So too the Joads, as individuals belonging to a larger unit, resolve to confront the determining elements and carry on with their journey. Even upon reaching California and acknowledging the dismal present reality, the family accepts the despairing conditions and continues to survive to the best of their ability. The "ferocious survival quotient" of the animals seems to reflect the tenacity of the Joad family, who crawl like the turtle in the dust and assemble like bugs for strength in numbers, in

order to remain intact as a group and outlast the determining natural elements (Cortez 58).

Subject to the naturalistic forces and deteriorating into animal-like states, the Joads do not rely on faith and spirituality for consolation. Faith in itself is useless in their despairing condition. "There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do", and what one does in terms of charity and goodwill towards the other is most significant (Grapes 30). The former preacher, Jim Casy, in many ways the spiritual centre of the novel, "loves people", and it is through this love that he is able to transcend the determining forces (Grapes 30). His Christ-like function is, in a sense, in opposition to the naturalistic philosophy that "strikes out from the centre of religious tradition to probe for meaning and knowledge apart from God" (Timmerman 278). Like Christ, Casy retreats into the wilderness in search of his identity. The preacher discovers that man "got one big soul ever'body's a part of", and unity within this larger whole constitutes "holiness" (Grapes 33 and 110). Although no longer a minister, Casy preaches "the religion of love" and offers an insight into naturalism (Carpenter 243). Casy indirectly suggests that the Christian Golden Rule (to always treat others as you would like them to treat you) is the source of dealing most successfully with the natural forces (Matthew 7:12). He insinuates that love of fellow man is the consolation in the struggle to survive.

Casy represents a religious presence because of his insight into the human spirit. Casy perceives the "tangible experience [as] holy" and acknowledges the grace of the Holy Spirit in his probe for meaning in life (Brasch 24). Consequently, whether Jim Casy is conscious of it or not, his revelation of the Holy Spirit and human spirit based on love, originates from a religious principle and is the essence of his religious representation in the novel. Casy's function, therefore, is to provide a "mystical" religious perspective into the determined natural forces that dominate the novel. There is no questioning the existence of naturalistic forces in The Grapes of Wrath. However, through the portrayal of Jim Casy, Steinbeck provides a religious dimension that opposes this naturalistic view, while enhancing the novel as a whole.

Stephen Railton states that Route 66 to California is like the road to Damascus that Saul takes in Acts, and that Steinbeck "makes the capacity for spiritual regeneration the essence of humanity" (Railton 29). It is important to make clear that in the naturalistic context, the spirit and faith must be, as this critic claims, regenerated. Perhaps, however, it is beyond regeneration and is more of a discovery of a different kind of spirituality not rooted solely in Holy Scripture. Only in this light is it valid to conclude that the struggles of the Joads "convert their movement into a pilgrimage toward the prospect of a new consciousness" (Railton 32). Jim Casy cannot rationalize why he should "hang

it on God or Jesus" since it is his fellow Okies who constitute "the human spirit" (Grapes 31). Only in each other is there, according to the former preacher, redemption.

This notion of faith in the group as being the true spirit of life is also evident in Steinbeck's The Log from the Sea of Cortez in his discussion of the interrelatedness of animals and humans. Steinbeck, like Jim Casy, perceives religion as the "understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality" and that "all things are one thing and that one thing is all things" (Cortez 216). The essence of religion, therefore, is not in the prayers over the bodies of the deceased but in the human spirit in terms of peoples' relationships with themselves, the other, and nature. It is imperative, then, that each character discover "with his own consciousness" the "new faith" proposed by Jim Casy (Railton 42). Casy believes "men got one big soul ever'body's a part of", and that the key to this new faith is not to be entirely selfless but consistently aware of the others' needs (Grapes 31). It is precisely this human spirit, this concept of one big soul, that does not exist in As I Lay Dying.

Casy realizes the ineffectiveness of traditional faith in a determined environment. He cannot ask the Okies to rely on the hope of Heaven or the Holy Spirit when hope in life has abandoned them, and the Holy Spirit is "downcast and sad" (Grapes 67). Knowing the oppression that burdens the

migrants, Casy is willing to help and contribute to the group not by preaching the word of God and the Holy Spirit but through the more tangible human spirit. Consequently, although the "very foundations of spiritual values seemed about to be swept away", Casy is the source that discovers a spirituality rooted in man and his place in nature (Ross 206). Virtue, for Steinbeck, consists of whatever furthers life and survival and is embodied in Casy's philosophy of the human spirit.

B) As I Lay Dying

Just as the environment is a determining force that drove the Joads from Oklahoma, so too in William Faulkner's novel, As I Lay Dying, Addie and Anse Bundren are determined by their environment. Anse considers it a part of his misfortune that during the journey towards Jefferson he is subjected to the natural forces of the flood. The rain drives "betwixt" himself and the family, and Anse can feel it "a-coming up that road like a durn man" (Dying 33). Anse personifies the stormy weather and considers it a furious old man who not only exploits his bad luck, but wants to drown out all "the living land" (Dying 33).

In The Paris Review Faulkner admits that he has subjected his characters to "universal natural catastrophes" for the purpose of giving "direction to their progress" (Adams 72). It is, however, a direction that, when considered together

with the influence of heredity and the lack of any spiritual significance in the Bundrens' lives, is a determining influence. The river and the land are considered "slow and violent", and more importantly, factors that "shape and create the life of man in its implacable and brooding image" (Dying 41). Man is, then, made from nature's image in all its violent and destructive characteristics. As a product of nature, man is at its mercy. "Humanity and its natural environment are not in harmony with time but exist in futile opposition to its destructive and alienating force" (Swiggart 129). The "harsh" drops of the rainstorm combine with the flood to produce a "vicious hissing" that symbolizes the natural forces that are out of control (Dying 67-8). The "thick dark current" is "ceaseless" in its motion and devastating effects (Dying 127). The water is personified as being "mournful" as if it is capable of lamenting the damage it inflicts on the land and the people (Dying 127). Anse realizes the formidable elements that confront him and is indeed "outraged" by them (Dying 69).

However, Anse Bundren "expected no less" from nature (Dying 69). There is the realization that nature is relentless in its confrontation with Anse. It is no wonder that Anse believes it is "a hard country on man" (Dying 97). The land forces him to a difficult existence. It is, for Anse, a "sinful world" that refuses to reward him for his labour (Dying 97).

Furthermore, the air itself in such an environment engulfs the Bundrens in futile, non-productive lives. Dewey Dell rests at the bedside of her mother and whispers in what Darl considers to be "useless air" (Dying 44). The air is not life-sustaining and nurturing. Rather, it is a "dead, hot, pale air" that suffocates and becomes an oppressive force upon the characters (Dying 58). "The dead air shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness" (Dying 58). The environment that the Bundrens exist in is, like the mother at the centre of the family, dead. The family is not only considered the product of rough and destructive nature, but is forced to live in an environment that stifles rather than sustains life. It is an environment from which they cannot escape.

For Addie Bundren, the environment determined her to a life of sorrow and vengeance that leaves her longing for death. She mysteriously is able to hear the "dark land" and "dark voicelessness" as she lays beside her husband who is considered by her already dead (Dying 160). Addie herself, as suggested by the title of the novel, is trapped in the process of dying long before she is on her deathbed. In the dead, hot air, Addie is tormented by the "wild darkness" of the Southern "terrible nights" (Dying 160). In a moment of despair, Addie's suppressed feelings of outrage surface into consciousness. The boiling water scalds and drowns the hot, sterile, and dark land. As she lays dying, Addie can identify only with the stagnant air, and her "sense of being" is solely

with the earth (Volpe 135).

Heredity, too, determines the character of the Bundrens. Anse Bundren believes he was born "luckless" and as a result has always been so (Dying 17). Throughout the novel Anse complains of being a helpless, innocent victim of misfortune (a source of the folk humour in the text). Tull and Darl, among others, make constant references to Anse looking out over the land, strengthening the impression that he is directly related to the same land and environment that contributes to his bad luck. Even his house is a source of misfortune. According to Anse, every possibility of bad luck is "bound" for the door of his home (Dying 31). Anse was born unlucky. Dr. Peabody has difficulty reasoning how one man can be so "flouted" by misfortune throughout his life (Dying 34). Peabody reaffirms the fact that the bad luck Anse was born with is a stronger determining force than any religious influence.

Anse is a "luckless man" who has managed to pass on his misfortune to his wife and family (Dying 37). He realizes that his family is far from ideal and considers Addie's only true blood relatives to be those in the graves at Jefferson. Cora Tull, another of the narrative perspectives outside the immediate family, considers Addie's nature to be far superior to Anse's. Only Addie was capable of "natural affection" since Anse's family lines are characteristic of individuals incapable of loving and caring (Dying 19). Addie cannot "even

make that change" from living to dying peacefully because she, according to Peabody, has been "a part of Anse for so long" (Dying 39). Cora Tull can only pray for the helpless victim who has not only suffered the misfortunes of her husband but is now in her illness, laying at the "mercy and the ministrations" of her luckless family (Dying 7). It is as if the Bundren name is itself a "Burden" and cursed by misfortune. Dewey Dell believes that her impregnation was also the result of misfortune. She "had to do it" and therefore "could not help it" (Dying 23). Anse's misfortune not only affects his life but the lives of those around him as well.

What role, then, does God play in the naturalistic context? Or, as Jewel asks, "'if there is a God what the hell is He for?'" (Dying 14). There is no consolation or redemption in God for the Bundrens. Jewel can only scorn a seemingly absent God who allows his family to make a spectacle of his mother's body. Dewey Dell considers her pregnancy a punishment from an angry God for her wrongdoing. Unable to seek any comfort in faith, Dewey Dell is isolated with little in her immediate surroundings to console her. "It is because I am alone", she believes, that she is beyond help or comfort from either God or her family (Dying 53).

Anse Bundren, in appearance only, is concerned with God's will. He resolves himself to obeying God's will and burying his wife in Jefferson. However, it is a shallow resolution

since the true motive for his trip to Jefferson is to purchase his teeth. It is an absurd transition for Anse to go from thoughts of his deceased wife, to asking for God's grace along the journey, to acknowledging his need for teeth. Anse does not rely on faith for assistance in his sufferings. Anse's misfortune is beyond God's grace. He realizes he is simply "a misfortunate man" (Dying 149). This is not to suggest that Anse condemns God for his misfortune. Instead, Anse considers his misfortune a "trial" imposed by God (Dying 215). He laments his condition but never once turns to prayer for comfort or guidance. Perhaps it is a tone of black humour that suggests, through the character of Anse Bundren, that only absurdity can exist in a determined environment. Anse cannot perceive any end or relief from his bad luck "once it starts" (Dying 215). The only fortunate person, according to Anse, is ironically Addie herself who is "lucky" to have died (Dying 238).

Addie Bundren also does not acknowledge a spiritual presence in her life. She is, at times, sacrificial towards the needs of her family but her sacrifice "is hardly spiritual" (Swiggart 118). In a moment of reflection on her deathbed, Addie thinks of her harsh treatment of Anse, her refusing to breast feed Cash and Darl, and her sinning with the Minister in the hope of experiencing through the compounded sin of committing adultery with a minister of God, a violation more complete than any she had known (Millgate

37). The background for such a reflection is the ever present "dark land talking the voiceless speech" (Dying 161). It is not a religious or spiritual feeling that is being experienced through this parody of a voiceless speech, since speech and communication have become meaningless for Addie. Her despair, reflected in the sinister land, is beyond the comfort of spirituality. Thus, the Bundrens do not so much "win a victory of the individual human will over nature", as they do survive the naturalistic elements (Swiggart 58). With no faith in God or in each other, it is difficult to consider the journey to Jefferson a "victory" since the term implies a triumphant spirit. Victory is more appropriate to the Joad family who survive the elements and excel beyond their suffering to discover the strength of the human spirit. In this novel, however, the spirit is stifled in the self.

C) Old Man

Just as the Joad and Bundren families are determined by the environment, so too is the tall convict in William Faulkner's novella, Old Man. For the Joads, the crusted land leaves only dust and forces the family to migrate West and confront the natural elements. The Bundrens are also subjected to naturalistic forces in the form of a flood, after concluding that the sinister and dark land is a part of the dead, stifling air.

In Old Man, however, the land of the Parchman Penitentiary that the tall convict farmed and the substance that resulted in it "belonged neither to them [the convicts] who worked it nor to those [the guards] who forced them at gun's point to do so" (Old Man 83). It is an indifferent land that is possessed or controlled by no one. There is no sense of belonging to the land that was evident to the Joads. This indifferent portrayal of the land foreshadows the naturalistic forces of the Mississippi flood of 1927, that is also indifferent to its victims and damaging force. According to the tall convict (who is observing the flooding waters from the prisoners' truck) the water appears to be separated into "three strata", much like the plight of the convict who goes from the confinement of prison, to the merciless flooding waters, before returning to the security of the jail (Old Man 85). Like Anse Bundren who stares at the land and ponders his misfortune, the tall convict stares at the land and the menacing grey sky to reflect upon the devastating consequences of the flood and the misfortune of its victims fleeing their homes for safety. By emphasizing the character's intense staring and subsequent meditation of the land, we as readers are forced to reflect as well on the profound impact of the land and the determining natural elements on the people. "The rush and fury of the flood itself" soon engulfs the tall convict in an environment that is determined by naturalistic forces out of control (Old Man 85).

In the spinning skiff the tall convict is determined by "the violent and incredible speed" of the current (Old Man 101). The tall convict remains "impervious to the implications of his new life" and as a result he "protects himself from a destructive conflict with the natural forces symbolized by the flood" (Swiggart 56). The great river serves as a perfect contrast to the static land from which he came. Thomas McHaney concludes that the destructive waters of the river are "masculine and a worthy adversary" while earth, "Mother Earth, the dependable, upon which man by difficult effort of ploughing and other labour may get some bounty, is in eclipse" (McHaney 141). Just as the Joads had no control over the menacing sun that crusted the earth and the dust that covered the land, and just as the Bundrens exist powerless in a deadened air and flooding waters, so too the tall convict is at the mercy of the "hysterical and unmanageable boat" spinning viciously upon the water (Old Man 103). The flooding river is indeed an "emblem for an existence which is fluctuating, uncontainable, and unjust" (Broughton 42).

The narrator of Old Man makes clear that it is "time and environment", and not the convict, that is "mesmerized" (Old Man 104). As a result, the individual is determined by an environment that is out of control. The tall convict is "toyed" with by the current rendering any action or resolution he may take to be completely insignificant (Old Man 104). Since the conditions determine the individual, it does not

truly matter what he may decide to do to confront such forces of nature. The skiff is personified as being tormented by its state of "airy indecision" (Old Man 113).

In all three of the novels under examination, the individuals who are determined by the naturalistic forces look upon a transformed world, a radically different place than they are used to, and discover an environment of "furious motion and incredible retrograde" (Old Man 113). Change and adaptability to such change is paramount since it is thrust upon all the individuals concerned. Nature controls the conditions of human existence, and in all three novels, nature has become an "inflammable geography" upon which has been "cast" the lives of those engulfed by such forces (Old Man 117-8). It is no wonder that the tall convict, like Anse Bundren, considers himself an unlucky individual. The tall convict "aint had no luck" in the conditions that confront him (Old Man 109).

In such a helpless state of existence, the tall convict is described as being like an "ant" completely unaware of the force and fury of the river (Old Man 85). In the naturalistic context, man is reduced to animal states with no control over the external forces. Just as the Joad truck crawls on towards California, so too the penitentiary truck "crawls" through the sideroads carrying the convicts to the flooding waters (Old Man 87). The convicts are "herded" like cattle on to the truck and forced to sit "like buzzards on a fence" (Old Man

88-9). Even before the tall convict is stranded on the boat, the environment has forced him into this animal-like existence. The prisoners are herded from the truck into the feeding lines, resembling a herd of cattle. "They waited until they were herded into line, they inched forward, their heads lowered and patient in the rain [as the rain fell] invisible and soundless" (Old Man 90).

The convict is well aware of the fact that he is circumscribed by his environment, including the island where he meets and is successful communicating with the Cajun hunter. However, despite his acceptance of his determined condition and his achievements hunting on the island, the tall convict knows it is not his life to remain on the island since he is "and would ever be no more than the water bug upon the surface of the pond" (Old Man 161). The pond represents the natural forces that not only determine him, but will always remain a mystery to him. The tall convict cannot penetrate the "lurking depths" of his mysterious condition (Old Man 161). Ironically enough, his only means of combating the mysterious naturalistic forces that have rendered him as helpless as a water bug is through the savage hunt and kill of the crocodile. Only by engaging in the hunt and making himself vulnerable to the fury of the crocodile and thus a part of nature, can the convict experience the same "raging life" he is so determined to destroy in the animal (Old Man 162). On the back of the crocodile, like Addie Bundren buried

in Jefferson among her true family and free from the anguish inflicted by the environment and her husband, the tall convict can achieve a sense of control in his life that is not possible on the boat. There is this same sense of control in The Grapes of Wrath in terms of the group concept. The way to combat the naturalistic forces is to remain intact as a unit and face the hardships as a group, rather than as isolated individuals. The encounter with the crocodile is the only time that the tall convict "embraces without hesitation" and is able to take part in the outcome (Old Man 162).

The tall convict does not embrace faith for help throughout his trials. In the other two novels there is at least a belief in God, although it is a shallow and surface devotion. In Old Man, the tall convict neither blames nor scorns God for his predicament. Rather, he considers himself a helpless victim of "the cosmic joker" who is responsible for his misfortune (Old Man 160). This is not to say that the tall convict is not a moral man. In many ways he is more moral than Anse Bundren, who futilely concerns himself with God's will. For the tall convict, it is a "rigid, lonely, and austere morality" rooted not in a spiritual realm but in more of a human context (Longley 31). Although the woman on the skiff is a severe social test and punishment for the tall convict, he refuses out of his absurd sense of right and wrong to abandon the burdensome passenger and her baby. One can draw a parallel to the human spirit discovered by Jim Casy in

The Grapes of Wrath that is based on a concern for the other. Although Casy's "one big soul" concept may be an exaggerated version of the tall convict's experience with the woman, there is no denying the virtue (absurd as it may be) in the tall convict's resolution to care for and protect the woman and thus fulfil his mission assigned by the penitentiary. The tall convict's situation is indeed the "classical existential moment", and it is his "moral strength that guarantees his survival" (Volpe 224).

Chapter II: Powerlessness

The second chapter of my study will examine, in all three texts, the aspect of naturalism that emphasizes the powerlessness of modern characters as a result of social forces, social factors, social pressures and tendencies (Farrell 9).

A) The Grapes of Wrath

The naturalistic forces that have driven the Joads from their homeland have created a despondent social condition. Having lost their land, the people of Oklahoma (according to Jim Casy) have also lost "the sperit" (Grapes 26). Casy himself doubts his suitability as a preacher. Casy questions his sinfulness and is, therefore, unable to reconcile his humanity and the demands of being a man of God. Casy represents a dispossessed people.

The parody to Casy as the representative of the migrant families is Joe Davis' boy, the tractor driver responsible for clearing the Okies' land. This individual is indifferent to the plight of the Okies. The social factors, which have taken the land from the Joads, have created work for him. The fact that he is recognized by the Joads as the son of a towns folk suggests that he too, like Tom Joad, has a stake in the land. Yet, the tractor driver "can't think" of anyone else and the consequences his actions are creating (Grapes 48). He is

symbolic of "the Bank" and its machines that impersonally repossess the land. In The Log from the Sea of Cortez Steinbeck reflects during a hunting trip with the Indians at Puerto Escondido, that man is "potentially all things", in terms of his range of emotion from love and concern to "greed and cruelty" (Cortez 165). Joe Davis' boy is a symbol of the economic determinism that controls human beings and keeps them at its mercy. The commercial machine cannot function productively if it concerns itself with individuals and the social pressures it imposes. Consequently, the Joads are powerless and at the mercy of the economic social forces.

In such an oppressive and victimizing social context, men "do evil things driven by the demands of an organism which they compose, but which is larger than themselves" (Bracher 190). What makes it worse is that the man who represents the organism is one of their own people forced to turn against them. Although there is a strong sense of betrayal expressed in the Joads' treatment of the tractor driver, one cannot help but sympathize with the young worker struggling to support his own family. He, too, is a victim of the naturalistic forces that have created the economic determinism that forces the Oklahoma farmers from their livelihood. Steinbeck seems to suggest in his portrayal of the corporate Machine that the Bank is a "natural manifestation" of the naturalistic conditions, and that their greatest crime is that they "have become de-humanized, have lost the vitality and initiative and

adaptability of good biological specimens of the human species" (Bracher 191). Thus, the true outrage that the Joads' manifest is at such corporate land owners who both drive them from their land, and employ their own helpless people to do so.

Muley Graves is another example of the consequences of the economic determinism that dispossesses the Okies. The stubborn Muley Graves refuses to abandon his home and remains rooted in a futile sense of place. He cannot accept the economic pressures that have forced the others to abandon their farms. Casy stresses the importance of remaining together in his discussion with Muley. Casy insists that by breaking up the family, Graves has only contributed to the pressures inflicted upon the people. Although Casy has lost his sense of spirit and represents a people with no sense of direction, he still is able to recognize the fact that division among the family does not ease the burdens of their social condition. This encounter with Graves early in the novel foreshadows Casy's discovery of the "over-soul" and his "one big soul" concept. Steinbeck, in his journal of June 1, 1938, makes it clear that he wants to present Jim Casy's "developing and questioning" mind and "developing leadership" quite early in the novel (DeMott 20). Muley realizes he is not only a "graveyard ghos" but that by abandoning the family and refusing to accept the social condition he is in fact "damn[ed]" (Grapes 65). Muley is the first character in the

novel who strays from the group, and like Noah and Connie (and essentially Grandpa who is deceived into leaving the Oklahoma farm) is never heard from again.

In light of the naturalistic elements and the social reality of economic determinism, one's allegiance to the group seems primary in the struggle to survive. Uncle John, too, in memory of his deceased wife lives a lonely life because he "never wanted to get close to folks" (Grapes 89). Again, a move away from the group, the family unit, towards a damaging state of individualism. Characters like Uncle John and Connie, who cannot distinguish strength in the group, resemble the members of the Bundren family and in many ways the tall convict as well. Faulkner's presentation of such characters, who also experience a sense of powerlessness and are at the mercy of their social condition, is as alienated individuals. Anse and Addie Bundren do not derive strength from one another in moments of crisis. There is no sustaining or redeeming common bond established between these two. The tall convict also fails to gain strength from the woman on the boat and is, instead, burdened by her presence. While in all three texts the characters endure their social predicaments, there exists this polarity of individuals.

In The Grapes of Wrath, however, even for the character who strays from the group, there is still the potential for some redemption. Noah, who was twisted out of shape at childbirth, abandons the group for life on the river.

Although he was "a stranger to all the world, he was not lonely" (Grapes 101). Noah still has a place in the group, and is isolated only because he chooses to be so. "Noah's disappearance from the book implies that the man who does not stumble forward, vanishes" (French 220). However, it is not as tragic a treatment as Addie Bundren's. Addie cannot discover significance in Anse and her despair is more profound. Addie cannot simply vanish, since she must endure the sorrow of her dying process. She experiences first hand the suffering of a living death amidst an environment that contributes to the pain.

What Faulkner portrays is a situation in which there is no Jim Casy figure who becomes the vehicle that moves people from existing as individuals to a united group more successful in confronting the naturalistic and social forces that victimize them. Casy vows to "be near to folks" in times of crisis (Grapes 121). But it is beyond the physical dimension that Casy is dealing with. As a group and a family united, the people became "an organization of the unconscious" (Grapes 128). The group is able to transcend the social factors and pressures that hinder them as individuals. The group shares in a collective unconscious whereby each individual's thinking is aligned to that of the group. The Bundren family cannot transcend the obstacles of their social reality and escape into another realm of collective thought. This refuge is not possible because the individuals themselves do not merge into

one another.

Although Casy is the source of this movement from an individual to a collective consciousness, it is significant to note the traumatic effect that economic determinism has on the Joads' sense of home and their belongings. In The Log from the Sea of Cortez Steinbeck states that man is the only animal who "lives outside of himself" and who "projects himself in the external qualities" of his possessions (Cortez 87). The Joads, most prominently Grandpa, cannot separate himself from his possessions since his view of the past is reflected in his belongings. The family attempts to "rediscover the identity it lost when it was dispossessed, as they travel from order (their old traditional life) to disorder (the road, California)" (Levant 99). In As I Lay Dying and Old Man, there is also a journey through naturalistic forces, but one wonders what degree of order existed before. Perhaps despair would be a more suitable description for Addie Bundren's predicament before the journey to Jefferson. There is no order in an existence that renders one's spouse as belonging more to the dead than to the living. The tall convict considers a life of confinement in jail more worthy than one of freedom outside the penitentiary.

Steinbeck believes that only after long observation can one know the animal under study. More significantly, if such an animal is taken away from its natural place (like the Joads) and subjected to abnormal conditions in a completely

different environment (the road and California), then the animal's "adaptability or lack of it" can be noted (Cortez 189). The Joads are under examination for their adaptability. Having lost their farmland and their belongings, the Joads are victims of yet another social factor. The Okies are discriminated against in California, and considered "dirty" and "scum" (Grapes 265). * The "worst" punishment, and perhaps the most profound sense of helplessness, is to be "ostracized" from the group and left alone to confront the hostile environment (Grapes 251). In California, the Joads remain subject to determining social pressures that condemn them to prejudicial treatment. There is "nothin'" they can do in an environment that further dehumanizes them (Grapes 265).

Steinbeck states that "beliefs persist long after their factual bases have been removed" (Cortez 180). For the Okies, the fallacious stereotypical beliefs of the people of California are deeply accepted, and not readily changed. Steinbeck makes sure that we know both the Okies' "looks and their nature" and the way they are perceived by the society that imposes its prejudices against them (Demott 29). The Okies, according to a gas station owner in California, have "no sense and no feeling" (Grapes 284). The migrant workers are confronted with a population that debases and ridicules them for their disparity. Nevertheless, such attitudes are a part of their circumstance, and Steinbeck's theme of "the entire social condition" that confronts the Okies (Lisca 91).

In perhaps the greatest insult directed at the Okies, the gas attendant scorns them because "they ain't human" (Grapes 284). The Joad family is driven from their land by the Bank, left powerless in light of the sweeping economic determinism and is exploited and subjected to more suffering in a hostile and non-receptive land. Through all of this anxiety, there is the constant pressure and real threat of the family dividing and becoming undone.

B) As I Lay Dying

The Bundren family, unlike the Joads, is divided. "The great static obstacle in the book is the death of Addie, the mother" (Adams 77). But it is Addie's process of dying that needs to be examined in the naturalistic context. Addie Bundren is powerless in an equally determining situation than the social pressures that afflict the Joads'. The social forces and factors that render Addie helpless are her immediate family, most significantly her husband Anse.

Anse Bundren, despite all the years of marriage with Addie, has only a very limited view of her. He believes Addie to be "ever a private woman", yet he does not bother to inquire why (Dying 17). He has accepted Addie's introverted behaviour without concerning himself with her motives for being so. It is no wonder, then, that Cora Tull believes that Addie lived "a lonely woman" isolated amidst her very family

(Dying 20). Cora is appalled that Addie is "dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart" from Anse (Dying 21). Although this narrative perspective is quite subjective, it is nevertheless a comment from an outsider, someone who does not belong to the immediate family. The fact that a distant neighbour can detect Addie's desolate condition strengthens the sense of futility among the family, especially Anse's lack of sensitivity towards his despairing wife. Dr. Peabody also notices Addie's sorrowful condition. He considers Addie a victim of a dysfunctional man and that Anse himself has indeed "worn her out" and forced her to accept a life resigned to dying (Dying 37). Dr. Peabody, having experienced first hand Addie's physical and psychological decay, concludes that death is not so much a phenomenon of the body, as much as he knows it "to be merely a function of the mind" (Dying 39). Death, thus, functions as a release for Addie from the suffering of being married to Anse. In Addie's mind, according to Dr. Peabody, is where the true decay of life began. As a result, Addie lays dying more in mind than in body, since death is a refuge that will protect her from the psychological torment of her inadequate husband. Anse cannot do anything to console his ailing wife. He is an absurd character who offers Addie no comfort or consolation in her suffering. Instead, in trying to smooth the quilt up to Addie's chin, he only "disarranges it" and makes it worse so that "at last he desists" (Dying 48). Anse cannot even imitate Dewey Dell's

handling of the blankets, as if any action that might reassure or comfort Addie is impossible for him.

Although Cora Tull, Dr. Peabody, and Dewey Dell provide insight into Addie's helpless situation with Anse, it is not until we hear from the victim herself that we can definitely conclude that there are some naturalistic social tendencies at work. Addie begins her narrative with her father's advice that seems to have lingered and permeated her consciousness throughout her life, becoming a testimony of her very existence: "My father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (Dying 155). Such a conviction directly opposes the strong life force that sustains the Joads throughout their struggles against the naturalistic forces. There is a disturbing tone of resignation in this advice passed down from a father to his daughter.

Addie Bundren cannot experience true communication with Anse. She needs to resort to perverted means like whipping the schoolchildren to make them "aware" of her (Dying 155). For a woman like Addie who lives in "virtual isolation" even before marrying Anse, her subsequent marriage to an inadequate husband only further solidifies her to a life of seclusion (Swiggart 60). In such a marriage, Addie is powerless and at the mercy of her unloving and impersonal husband. The family unit in The Grapes of Wrath is a source of strength that unites the family in their struggle against the social forces,

but in As I Lay Dying the family is segregated and made up of isolated individuals. Most tragically, just as the economic determinism renders the Joad family helpless, in Addie Bundren's case Anse himself is the social force that alienates her and contributes to her growing despair. Reflecting upon her marriage day, immediately after recalling how she whipped the schoolchildren, Addie says she "took Anse" (Dying 156). There are no endearing terms associated with her marriage right from the beginning. It seems to be more of an aggressive action in the same light as her treatment of the schoolchildren. Addie Bundren is trying to bridge her isolation the only way she knows how, through aggressive and forward actions that provide momentary control over the other. However, as soon as she realizes the unsuccessful nature of her tactics, she is thrust into a powerless role and becomes subject to the social pressures imposed by Anse.

Addie's helplessness in her social predicament becomes strikingly clear with the birth of Cash. Upon her son's birth, she realizes that "living was terrible" (Dying 157). The very concept of starting a family and nurturing children is distorted and becomes a parody of the love and happiness usually associated with childbirth. Cash does not represent a consolation for her isolation and outrage towards Anse. Instead, Addie is further disillusioned with her social circumstances. She realizes that at the essence of her isolation is her inability to establish any sincere

communication with her husband. Addie's life is burdened by a stifling inability to discover meaning in Anse and thereby vent her concerns, frustrations, and anger. "I learned that words are no good; that words don't ever fit even what they are trying to say" (Dying 157). Therefore, with no adequate means to express herself, Addie Bundren is powerless in a sterile, non-loving, and frustrating marriage. Communication is what sustains the Joads in their struggle. There is no hesitation by any member of the family to voice his/her concerns if they so choose to do so. More significantly, however, when such concerns or individual opinions are voiced, the family or group both hears and listens to them. In the Bundren family, there is a lack of individuals listening to each other. Addie's section emphasizes "the meaningless abstractions of words as contrasted with the meaningful concreteness of actions" (Millgate 36). In The Grapes of Wrath both words (communication between people) and actions are concrete and meaningful because the family relies on each other for strength. Addie cannot reconcile words and actions into a meaningful reality.

Not even the act of sexual union can reconcile Addie to a loving, caring, and meaningful relationship with Anse. It, too, contributes to her powerlessness. Anse cannot penetrate Addie's true self. But ironically, Addie cannot escape the social factors that, in turn, confine her self. She is isolated within herself and alienated from her husband. The

act of submitting to Anse in intercourse fails to fulfil Addie in terms of it being a true expression of communication. Rather, it trespasses upon her selfhood and further alienates Anse from her. Addie's sense of "aloneness", her inner self, is all that she has left as she lays dying. Addie's social reality "consists of a few empty gestures made in the futile struggle to achieve a permanent self" (Swiggart 124). The focus of As I Lay Dying, reflected in the multiple narrative perspectives, is on the self in relation to the social natural environment. Addie considers herself an isolated individual trying to cope with a helpless social predicament that has made communication with Anse impossible. In The Grapes of Wrath, though, the self is discussed in relation to the other. Each individual has a respective place in the group and contributes to its survival. Both texts, thus, deal with struggle, but in The Grapes of Wrath the individuals are able to transgress their isolation and discover meaning in each other. The lack of any sincere communication prevents Addie from doing so. As an alienated self, Addie represents the rest of the Bundren family in lacking both a "past and future" (Swiggart 123). Addie is tragically trapped in the present, and cannot draw upon family and tradition to sustain her suffering. By relying on the past and their strong cultural tradition, the Joads are able to envision and strive for a future together as a family, free from the suffering inflicted by natural and social forces beyond their control.

Love and genuine concern for the other is the strength of the Joad family. It is the force that binds people together. For Addie Bundren, however, the word love is "just a shape to fill a lack" (Dying 158). It is a meaningless void in Addie's life that brings her no comfort in her despairing isolation. Its meaninglessness, like the dead air and sinister dark land, only contributes to her powerlessness. Time itself, combined with her oppressive husband, exist for Addie "outside the circle" (Dying 158). These elements integral to human life do not represent any redemptive qualities in Addie's life and remain outside her inner self. Genuine emotion and concern for life, Anse, and love is far from the centre of her being. Addie's frustration and fury are pent up inside of her and remain isolated in her mind and "not projected into a social context" (Swiggart 115). Since communication between Addie and Anse is impossible and feelings remain within the individual, the social context becomes not only non-redeeming but oppressive. Consequently, Addie cannot achieve personal security since the social forces represented by Anse fail to provide stability and meaning for her sense of complete isolation and alienation from her husband.

Having been "tricked" by Anse into conceiving Darl, Addie comes to the realization that her father's prophecy, concerning life as being a preparation for death, is correct. She knows that she is determined to exist in a futile social predicament where the only purpose is to ready oneself for the

grave. In Addie's opinion, Anse "did not know that he was dead" (Dying 159). It is, for Addie, an absurd situation that contributes to her isolation from Anse. Anse is, thus, the primary source of her suffering. He has become just a physical being to her who provides no emotional support. Just as the word love is a mere shape to fill a lack, so too Anse is a "shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame" (Dying 159). What is most disturbing is Addie's powerlessness to change her isolated condition. Anse is a lifeless being who cannot fill the void in Addie's life. Rather than relying on Anse for strength in her ailing condition, Addie desires only that he become "not-Anse", everything he is not (Dying 160). The only time Anse represents any meaning in Addie's life, is when he is considered in the negative sense. Anse has failed to allow Addie to appreciate a sense of her own identity. Her disbelief in abstract words of love and pride come to a climax with her vision of Anse. Addie locates the meaning of existence "in the body and the living world" but does so in a determined, "life-repressive social order" (Fowler 115).

C) Old Man

The tall convict in Old Man is a modern character who is powerless as a result of social forces and pressures. His helplessness, however, is due to neither the economic

determinism that confronted the Joad family, nor to a dysfunctional spouse inflicted on Addie Bundren. As a helpless victim outside the fraternity of the prison, the tall convict is determined to struggle with not only the natural forces of the flood but the burden of a pregnant woman (his most immediate social factor) who in many ways is more tormenting than the flood itself.

Even before being stranded on the boat with the woman, the tall convict suffers from a "raging impotence" as a result of an absurd failed robbery attempt that has landed him in the penitentiary (Old Man 79). The tall convict's outrage, clearly more visible than the plump convict's impotence, foreshadows his inability to accept the woman on the run-away skiff. In prison, the tall convict is secure from not just the society outside the prison walls, but more specifically, from women. There is the impression, from the beginning of the novella, that in jail the tall convict can, at least, control his outrage by channelling his frustrations into the security of the fraternity of the prison. He can rely on his fellow male prisoners for support, since it is the prisoners' chains that are the "clashing umbilicals" that bind the men together physically, and provide emotional stability (Old Man 89). In the river separated from the prisoners with only the woman as company on the boat, the tall convict's umbilical cord is severed, and he is directly confronted with a fertile woman, the source of his impotence (in a metaphoric sense).

The naturalistic forces place him on the flooding river with a pregnant woman, and his outrage and impotence leaves him a powerless victim.

"This, out of all the female meat that walks, is what I have to be caught in a runaway boat with" (Old Man 106). The woman's company on the boat provides no consolation for the tall convict. He cannot derive any strength in the fact that he is not alone in his struggle against the naturalistic forces. The tall convict cannot even remain indifferent to the reality of her presence. Instead, her presence is dominant in his mind and the source of tremendous anxiety for him. The woman is not a redeeming source for the tall convict, as it is for the Joad family who resolve to stay together and become a larger group. For the Joads, the other is a reassuring presence, a redemptive factor in light of the sweeping naturalistic forces. The tall convict is a reflection of Addie Bundren whose primary source of suffering is her spouse. Addie cannot share her life with an insecure, unloving husband and thus desires that Anse become "not-Anse" to absolve her of the pain. In Old Man, the tall convict shares Addie's outrage towards his most immediate social factor, but it is a general frustration towards all women, rather than a direct hatred of a certain individual. Despite this difference, both Addie and the tall convict are powerless at the hands of social pressures because they fail to communicate their feelings and cannot project their outrage

from themselves on to another being.

The human spirit that consoles Jim Casy, and is in fact a religious perspective into the determined natural forces, is beyond the understanding of these two characters. Both Addie the tall convict cannot transcend their individual predicaments and participate in a sustaining, communal spirit that comforts rather than oppresses. For the tall convict, the woman is a burden whom he needs to discuss in animalistic terms. She is, to him, a carcass of dead weight. The disparity of the tall convict's social predicament is between his commitment to rescuing the burdensome woman, and his "desperate wish to remain uninvolved" (Swiggart 57). Although there is no denying the humour in the tall convict's dilemma, it does nevertheless indicate a troubled character. The convict's inability to assimilate females into his existence and his desire to retreat back into prison free from society outside the jail, are quite disturbing perspectives. It is an absurd social reality that cannot be dismissed by humour. The tall convict is a victim of the

...mysterious female principle that seems to represent uncontrollable forces. In the alien world into which he is dragged by the female, the male's sole source of power is his maleness, his instinctive moral integrity. (Volpe 218)

It is moral integrity that allows the convict to not simply abandon the woman and endure a seemingly helpless situation.

The flood becomes a secondary concern for the convict

that has combined with the uncontrollable forces to burden him with the woman. The tall convict can think only of how he can surrender the woman as quickly as possible and "turn his back on her forever, on all pregnant female life" (Old Man 110). He longs to return to the penitentiary, the "monastic existence" of shotguns and bars that serves as a refuge securing him from women (Old Man 110). His true confinement, ironically, is freedom from the jail in the company of a woman. It is as ironic as Addie Bundren's sense of freedom from Anse through death. In both cases, the absurdity of their respective desires reflects a powerless social predicament that is vulnerable to desperate means. While the tall convict endures the social factor the woman represents, he still suffers from an "impotent rage at his absolutely gratuitous predicament" (Old Man 111). It is imperative to make clear that impotence implies a lack of both sexual power (and thereby a metaphoric castration from women) and a lack of mental power (and thereby his inability to consider the fertile woman in anything but animalistic and dehumanizing terms). It is his powerlessness to associate with the woman that causes the tall convict to "retreat from the full expression of his humanity" and return to the penitentiary (Broughton 172). He has, in a sense, been defeated by the social factor that became a most prominent part of the determining naturalistic forces. In the security of the penitentiary, the tall convict remains dysfunctional and free

from the threat of having to deal with his sexuality in the presence of women.

The "belly" of the pregnant woman is equally oppressive for the tall convict (Old Man 116). He is not only confronted with a carcass-like woman but, in his opinion, a repulsive symbol of female fertility. The convict feels the need to dispose of not only the woman but her overbearing stomach that further alienates him from her. In contrast, female fertility in The Grapes of Wrath is not an alienating force. Rose of Sharon does her best amidst the dire circumstances to nurture the fetus and deliver a healthy baby. Her pregnancy is a top priority for the Joad family, especially Ma Joad, since the family respects a new born life. Such reverence is lost in the two Faulkner texts under study. Dewey Dell, feeling like an alienated victim, does her best to secretly abort her fetus. For the tall convict, the pregnant woman is further despised because of her sexuality. Since he is unable to establish meaningful relationships with women, he especially cannot bear the sight of the pregnant woman. Ironically, the tall convict relies on his physical power to "be free of the woman he has rescued" but deploras because of her visible sexuality (Longley 30). The woman, who becomes a more significant burden than the natural conditions of the flood, develops into "one single inert monstrous sentient womb" (Old Man 118). The fetus itself becomes, according to the tall convict, non-human. However, it degenerates into an even

worse condition than the woman. The belly is a sluggish, barely conscious monster-like entity that further threatens the tall convict's powerlessness. The womb has no place in the "moral sanctuary" of the prison where the tall convict has the power to control his life (Swiggart 52).

Addie Bundren, too, is powerless in her sexuality with Anse. She is deceived into conceiving her children and unable to experience true communication with Anse. Like the tall convict her sexuality is frustrated, and because of this lack of communication she is condemned to a life of misery with Anse.

Similarly, the tall convict considers himself completely "doomed to a helpless predicament with the pregnant female (Old Man 122). Sexuality and human reproduction do not redeem the sense of alienation in Addie and the tall convict but rather augments it. Not surprisingly, the birth of the baby reaffirms his insecurity and frustration. The baby "severs" the tall convict from women and casts him upon a medium that he "was born to fear" (Old Man 132). Both the fetus and the child represent the "same kind of alien force, from the convict's point of view, as the flooded river under him" with both forces working against him (Swiggart 55). The convict reluctantly assists in the birth process, and symbolically cuts the umbilical cord of the baby, just as the flood severs his own life force from the fraternity of the prison. Yet, the convict refuses to look at the woman during the birth

process for fear of being completely disgusted. He cannot watch the life sustaining act of the woman breast feeding her child. Not only is there no concern for getting to know the woman personally, but the convict does not even comment on the sex of the baby. One gets the impression that the less he knows about the burdens, the less suffering he experiences. Consequently, women, fetuses, and children are not part of the life force that clashing umbilicals of the prison provide for him. (The clashing umbilicals are, ironically, a comfort to the tall convict). Since he is powerless in their presence, he must live apart from these threatening factors that serve to further alienate him as a victim. His struggle, like Addie Bundren's, is an internal one and the cause of both their isolation. Not able to discover the company of another person, Addie and the tall convict resign themselves to the "constricted desolation" of the social forces that have rendered them powerless (Old Man 133).

In the security of the jail, the tall convict has "turned his back on the prospect of life with the woman" but has done so in order to gain some control in his life (Longley 32). The tall convict, thus, is determined by naturalistic forces and is victimized by the presence of the woman. Even after the experience in the safety of the prison, the tall convict reflects on the woman as merely a "millstone which the force and power of risible Motion" had subjected him to (Old Man 180).

Consequently, at the mercy of economic and social forces, Casy and the Joad family recognize the need to remain together and take comfort in each other. Faulkner's characters, who are also subject to a sense of powerlessness in their social condition, do not derive strength from one another. Addie Bundren and the tall convict can find little consolation in their immediate company, and remain isolated.

Chapter III: Optimism

Naturalists despaired and hoped at one and the same time. There is, then, as a part of naturalism an optimistic social purpose (Walcutt 22). The final chapter will examine the optimism in all three novels.

A) The Grapes of Wrath

At the conclusion of his six week trip to the Gulf of California (1940), Steinbeck offered the following reflection: "Our fingers turned over the stones and we saw life that was like our life" (Cortez 270). The Grapes of Wrath is a naturalistic novel that examines human endurance under dire circumstances, life under the rocks of the tide pool. But the novel does not deal with only despair. "The Joads, through their fierce determination to endure the naturalistic forces, adhere to what Steinbeck believes to be the "only commandment for living things--survive!" (Cortez 241). Furthermore, Casy, Tom, and Ma Joad discover something meaningful in their lives that is beyond the level of basic survival.

"In order for the Okies to survive the determining elements, the omniscient narrator in the novel makes it clear that the people had to remain "whole" (Grapes 6). Although misfortune effects everyone of them, it must not divide them as a group. This notion of wholeness is central to the development of the novel, and is the essence of the social optimism that emerges. In The Log from the Sea of Cortez

Steinbeck states that hope "implies a change from a present bad condition to a future better one", and it is hope that "cushions the shock of experience", the experience of an oppressive present reality (Cortez 86). In this light, both Addie Bundren and the tall convict can be optimistic, though in varying degree. Addie longs for the comfort of death to escape her sorrowful present reality, and the tall convict anticipates his return to prison and freedom from women. The optimism in both the latter cases is absurd in comparison to the Joad family who rely on a prosperous future in California, together as a family, as their sustaining hope to escape their determined present condition.

Jim Casy is the embodiment of hope and optimism in the novel. He can sense his "call to lead the people" and decides to lead by example rather than relying on traditional religion and Holy Scripture (Grapes 27). "Casy can no longer exploit his followers and abuse his position as preacher. Instead, he sacrifices himself for the sake of the group." In As I Lay Dying and Old Man, Addie and the tall convict are primarily concerned with their own problems as individuals. Their hope is individualistic. "Casy, on the other hand, seeks to re-establish "some kind of home" for the migrant people" (Grapes 72). In doing so, Casy can keep the group intact." David Wyatt states that Steinbeck has "learned the value of home while losing belief in the possibility of it" (Wyatt 24). Yet, in the person of Jim Casy, is the possibility of home not

at its strongest? Not so much in a physical home based on locale but in a symbolic home that serves as a canopy for the human spirit. The value of a home, in this case in the concept of home, is not only learned but presented as an ideal refuge from the naturalistic forces that determine the Joads' present condition. By taking on the responsibility of being a leader of the Okies and by wanting to re-establish a communal home rooted in the group, Jim Casy is focused on doing "stuff that means somepin" (Grapes 76).

Meaning, for Jim Casy, is defined in terms of the people "workin' together" so that individuals are untied and "harnessed to the whole shebang" (Grapes 105). This concept is reflective of Ishmael's notion of the monkey-rope in Herman Melville's novel, Moby-Dick, where individuals are dependent on other individuals for their survival on the Pequod. For Casy, the interconnectedness of human beings transcends into another realm so that the result of being harnessed to the other is in fact "holy" (Grapes 105). This spirituality is rooted in the individual but includes all individuals working towards the same cause. Traditional religion is secondary to this human spirit that sustains individuals in crisis. It is the group that replaces religion and becomes "a morally pure instrument of power" (Levant 98). The result of this union is genuine "love" for the other (Grapes 105). In As I Lay Dying and Old Man, there is no sustaining love. According to Casy the individual alone, like Addie and the tall convict,

violates the holiness of the group and is thus forced to exist outside of the benefits of this communion.

Casy's role in the novel goes beyond a philosophic one. He sacrifices himself to the authorities, in a Christ-like function, for the sake of the group which can now function in his absence. Through his sacrifice, Casy's retribution of his sins is complete. Secondly, his sacrifice has compensated the group and more specifically the Joad family, for their acceptance and love. The naturalistic forces have not robbed Casy of his goodwill towards the other. He is captured by the authorities with a "curious look of conquest" on his face (Grapes 343). Such a look of fulfilment becomes symbolic of the optimistic social purpose in the novel. Even the turtle, the analogy for the Joads' struggle along Highway 66, endures the heat, dust, and reckless truck drivers with "old humorous eyes" that only look ahead as the turtle continues to crawl towards the West (Grapes 21). Most appropriately, the novel concludes with Rose of Sharon sacrificing herself for a stranger just after having lost her baby. Her action incorporates Casy's curious look and the turtle's humorous eyes that in both cases, represent fulfilment. Rose of Sharon "smiled mysteriously" upon offering her breast to the dying old man (Grapes 581). The sense of fulfilment is a result of participating in and contributing to the human spirit that Casy represents. The novel begins with an act of charity between two strangers (trucker giving Tom a ride). In the

middle chapters the novel is filled with sacrifice and goodwill despite the most trying of circumstances. It ends, thus, with a most profound example of charity and human communion. What the novel presents, and what is perhaps most absent in Faulkner, is the "inner peace" both Casy and Tom find not so much in acting with others, but in "feeling [their] oneness with all (Wyatt 40).

Tom Joad, like Casy, represents an optimistic social purpose in the novel. He advocates that the family remain a unit throughout the journey, and furthermore accepts Casy's belief that the migrants are all a part of one group. Tom, who unlike Casy can make decisions for the Joad family, states that the Wilsons should accompany them along the highway in their time of need because to remain a group is "good for ever'body" (Grapes 189). Tom reflects Steinbeck's observations, in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, that there is "much more to a school of fish than the fish themselves" (Cortez 211). By suppressing their individual needs the Okies can seek refuge in the common plight of the people and become one unit rather than a group of individuals. With Tom adopting Casy's ideology, combined with Ma Joad's influence, each member of the family grew into "his proper place, grew into his duties" in order for the group to function efficiently (Grapes 252). In turn, each family "integrated' with fellow migrants to become an even bigger group (Grapes 252). By uniting, the weary travellers discover a means to

combat their isolation. The Okies are examples of Steinbeck's belief that through struggle and sorrow people "are able to participate in one another" (Cortez 117). The group confronts difficulty by "communal effort, demonstrating the viability of its social compact" and providing an optimistic social purpose (Bowron 214).

Tom, though he only echoes Casy's prophecies, is the symbolic convert to "the human spirit" and the one responsible for transmitting Casy's ideology to Ma Joad. Tom is a witness to Casy's concept that the individual soul is useless unless it is "with the rest, an'was whole" (Grapes 535). Casy, though he is sacrificed and absent from the family, is present in spirit through Tom. Both Casy and Tom represent individuals who can assimilate themselves with the larger unit. Tom concludes that "a fella ain't no good alone", and it is this very isolation that alienates Addie and the tall convict and prevents them from merging with the other to find strength and comfort in the human spirit.¹¹ It is interesting that both Casy and Tom disappear from the novel after sharing their philosophy with a member of the group. This is testimony to the fact that the group concept is larger than any one individual. Had either Casy or Tom remained with the group their stature as leaders would have become of epic proportions. What is important is their presence in spirit, just as Casy's spirit is so prominent that Tom can almost "see him sometimes" (Grapes 537). Tom indicates by hiding that his

objectives are complete and he, like Casy before him, is ready to take "the final leap into the kingdom of spirit he attains in the end" (Railton 39).

Ma Joad, like Casy and Tom, embodies an optimistic social purpose. As the "citadel of the family", her position amidst the despairing determining forces does not waver (Grapes 95). She is the calming agent that allows the other members of the family to maintain their perspective on remaining together. Ma Joad is a figure of "dignity" and "calm beauty" in the position of "healer" to the rest of the family (Grapes 95). Where is this central figure of stability and healer in As I Lay Dying and Old Man? Faulkner depicts a situation in which the "citadel" of the family, Addie Bundren, experiences a despairing loneliness and is incapable of being a calming agent to her dysfunctional family. As the centre of the family, Ma Joad is able to "assert herself and still maintain her role as selfless nurturer of the group" (McKay 51). No one in Faulkner's two novels models an endurance of the determining natural and social forces and maintains purpose and optimism for a more prosperous future. Ma Joad, unlike Addie and the tall convict, derives strength from the other. She is in control of herself to the best of her ability under the circumstances and is resolved, essentially out of fear, to see to it that the family does not "bust-up" (Grapes 218). In order for Ma to remain the fortress of the family, the group philosophy embodied in Casy and continued through Tom must

survive. Steinbeck makes it clear that she alone is ineffective without the group, and in no circumstance is the individual greater than the whole. Ma Joad becomes "the nucleus of order and survival" because she is determined to endure (Lisca 101). Ma insists that despite the hardships of a determined environment, they will "go on" because everything the group does is "aimed right at goin' on" (Grapes 360 and 542). Ma Joad reflects the "stolid, sluggish endurance" of the shark Steinbeck catches and admires in the Gulf, who lived because he "would not release life" (Cortez 213). Ma Joad is truly heroic because she is "so good a biological specimen" (Bracher 193), and her endurance and drive for familial unity moves "beyond the family" into the realm of human spirituality that Casy prophesied (Pressman 73). Casy's human spirit, embodied in Ma Joad, is a guiding force even in the most desperate situations.

Nellie McKay, in her discussion of the strength and wisdom of the mother, states that Ma Joad is willing to assert herself in light of her husband's incapability, and that without her the entire family would not have survived the journey to California. However, McKay concludes that despite Ma Joad's role as leader of the family, she "never achieves an identity of her own" and is never "an individual in her own right" (McKay 52). Yet, does she not establish an identity by being the figure of stability at the centre of the family? Ma Joad does not entirely abide by the patriarchal hierarchy of

the 1930's and makes it clear to her husband and family that the group concept is of paramount importance. She is relied upon for both guidance and advice, and thus is more than willing to provide both of these aspects to her loved ones. It is because Ma Joad is a strong individual in her own right that she is able to support and nurture others and is an example of the force of an individual committed to the group concept.

Based on the optimistic social purposes advocated through Jim Casy, Tom and Ma Joad, John Condor concludes that Steinbeck is most successful as a naturalistic writer because of this ability to move the naturalistic tradition from "grim hopelessness to hope triumphant" (Condor 195). He argues that the novelist is successful in bringing a sense of fulfillment to individuals by moving the group from determinism to self-determination (Condor 195). While it is difficult to argue the aspect of self-determination in the migrants as the novel progresses, it can be questioned that The Grapes of Wrath concludes in a state of "hope triumphant". This is an overly optimistic and premature perspective. It is true that the novel ends on a most hopeful note because of Rose of Sharon's feeding of the stranger while she herself is trying to escape the flooding waters, but it is not triumphant. To say that hope has triumphed is a damaging general conclusion that ignores the worsening environment and grim reality the Okies are victims of at the end of the novel. Hope has not

completely triumphed over the sense of determinism that, as Emile Zola says, "dominates everything" (Zola 18).

B) As I Lay Dying

In Faulkner's novel, As I Lay Dying, there is also an optimistic social purpose, despite an otherwise determined and despairing environment. It is, however, very different from the strong sense of hope in the force of the group that is evident in The Grapes of Wrath. It is a less fulfilling and reassuring optimism because it seems to be the result of Addie's desperate condition at the mercy of a dysfunctional husband.

The Bundren family is committed to fulfilling their promise of burying Addie in Jefferson as she requested. Although each member of the family struggles with discovering their identity upon her death, they remain obligated to their mother's wish. Darl believes that Addie's coffin will provide her with "confidence and comfort", since it is custom-built by Cash (Dying 4). Ironically, the coffin is to be the means that will console Addie in death with the same characteristics that were inaccessible during her life. Cash busied himself in a frantic attempt to make the casket as perfect as possible for his mother. He refused to allow the damaged bridge to prevent the family from reaching Jefferson, and seems throughout the multiple narrative perspectives to be the most

active individual and the one committed to completing all the tasks he undertakes. Despite the naturalistic forces that provide consistent obstacles for the family Cash is determined that they "can get there" (Dying 99). Jewel, who is enraged at the fact that Cash is building the casket outside Addie's window, is willing to sell his prized horse for the sake of the family objective of reaching Jefferson. Similarly, there is optimism and hope in Dewey Dell's concern in nursing her dying mother and remaining by her bedside.

Anse himself embodies some optimism in the novel. Despite the fact that he has neglected his duties as husband, upon reflecting on his wife's death he comes to the realization that Addie's true family is "waiting for her" in Jefferson (Dying 18). There does not seem to be a tone of contempt or jealousy in Anse's speech, but rather an absurd acceptance of the fact that Addie belongs to her "blood" relatives more than she does to his family (Dying 18). The fact that this resignation does not stop Anse from undertaking the perilous journey to Jefferson is optimistic in itself. He does not allow the misfortune in his life to interfere with his obligation to Addie, even though she feels nothing but rage and hatred towards Anse for making communication and happiness impossible in her life. Despite the overwhelming natural conditions that confront him, Anse is the leader of the family and the one who reminds them that he has given Addie his "word" that she will be laid to rest in Jefferson

(Dying 126). For Anse, such an obligation is "sacred" and must not be violated. Ironically, the sanctity of his words while Addie was alive were not only violated, but considered completely meaningless by her (Dying 126). The optimism in the Bundren family's resolve to bury their mother does not ignore the fact that the journey to Jefferson is selfishly motivated by the individuals involved. Yet, both Darl and Dewey Dell express a concern for Addie apart from the trip to Jefferson. Cash creates, to the best of his ability, a coffin that will be most suitable for his mother. Anse, as well, remains committed to the sanctity of his word and is depicted as too simple and basic a character to be capable of any profound deception. This is not to deny the fact that he longs for the teeth that await him in Jefferson, but it is to affirm the rather simple sense of honour that he has for Addie's last wish.

There is also an optimistic social purpose in Addie Bundren's desire to be buried at Jefferson. It is ironic, but perhaps most appropriate, that Addie is buried in her wedding dress. The wedding dress is a symbol of initiation into a life of communion with another, a life of sharing and security. Addie Bundren's symbolic wedding march is in the trip to Jefferson. She has the sense of longing, as a bride longs for her spouse, to be united with her true family in Jefferson. Upon her death Addie, as the bride figure, enters into a spiritual life of communion and interrelatedness with

the most significant people in her life. She anticipates the life beyond earth that will provide the security and comfort unattainable during her life with Anse. The wedding procession to Jefferson is on the way to New Hope Church. For Addie, Jefferson represents New Hope and the optimism of becoming one with her family.

Addie's hope and optimism in her earthly family has been extinguished. The meaninglessness of words, as evidenced in Cora Tull and more significantly Anse Bundren, leaves Addie helpless in concluding that "talking and doing are utterly disparate activities" (Broughton 127). As a result, though Addie is considered the centre of the family, she lacks self-identity and cannot be the same figure of stability as Ma Joad. If it is true that the dominating aspect of Faulkner is a self-reliance gone mad, a version of Emerson's over-soul taken to the extreme, then it is appropriate that Addie Bundren's hope is rooted solely in her "self" and has nothing to do with the Bundren family. As a powerless victim of both natural and social forces, Addie Bundren's remaining hope, albeit a selfish one, is through the New Hope of death. Addie's "powerful personality" has held the family together for a time, but it is through a different bond than Ma Joad's (Longley 38). The Bundren family's sense of unity that revolves around a desperate central mother figure is a pathetic resemblance to the Joad family who depend upon the stability of the powerful mother. Addie cannot assume a

loving and caring role in her environment, and thus as the novel progresses she (even in death) "corrodes the family's emotional life" (Swiggart 116). Through death, however, and her marriage to the security of her blood relatives, Addie Bundren can anticipate the New Hope of establishing an "absolute identity" for herself (Swiggart 118). The people in Ma Joad's environment are sources of comfort and reassurance, and alienation from the group is considered the worst punishment. For Addie, however, her "reward" is being completely "free" of Anse and able to embark on a journey of hope and the optimism such a journey affords (Dying 82).

The journey is symbolized by the New Hope Church sign on the side of the road that is seemingly ever present. The sign itself is not only unscarred, but it radiates a "tranquil assertion" to the corpse that passes by (Dying 95). It is one of the few objects in the novel that is not in or represents uncontrollable chaos. Amidst the overwhelming natural forces, and the absurd efforts of the Bundrens to overcome them, the sign asserts and therefore foreshadows for Addie the calmness of an afterlife in union with her deceased family. The sign is, appropriately, bright white reflecting the colour of Addie's wedding dress. One is reminded of a similar feeling of "tranquil assertion" and social optimism in Jim Casy's curious look of conquest upon his sacrifice for the group, and in Rose of Sharon's mysterious but calm and reassuring smile upon her sacrificial and generous act.

Like The Grapes of Wrath, both novels deal with a journey toward New Hope, but with completely different motivations and results. For this reason, I disagree with Edmond Volpe who states that Addie Bundren "does not believe in an after-life" (Volpe 135). Her desire to die does not symbolize the finality of death. In contemplating death and the afterlife, Addie anticipates the tranquillity and rewards of a New Hope not experienced in an earthly life devoid of meaning. It is a rather absurd and disturbing optimistic social purpose based on life with the deceased, but it is nevertheless a significant and motivating force in the novel. Samson, a farmer in the Southern countryside, identifies the Bundren family on their journey as the ones "from down beyond New Hope" (Dying 98). It is an accurate assertion to conclude that the family is, for Addie, completely beyond New Hope or any hope. Only by way of the wedding march to Jefferson in her wedding dress and in the "tranquil assertion" of death, can Addie emerge from beyond New Hope. The hardships of Addie's journey are "less the pilgrimage, pageant, or progression than that of a return to one's homeland" and to one's people (Leceracle-Sweet 49). For the rest of the Bundren family the signboard to New Hope comes in sight and is, according to Dewey Dell, personified as "looking out at the road" (Dying 106). Yet, it seems to Dewey Dell that it will take forever to reach it. New Hope is not possible for those who Addie leaves behind, and there is no social optimism here.

The family's private goals are not sufficient in creating an optimistic and hopeful future. The social optimism is in Addie's desire to be with her true family in Jefferson.

Is it fair to conclude, however, that the feeling we are left with at the end of this novel is the "conviction that no matter what happens life goes on?" (Adams 83). Is the trip to Jefferson a "simply comic" ordeal that we, as readers, can only laugh at and then dismiss in this light? (Millgate 38). There is no denying the absurdity of the Bundren's actions and the subsequent humour that results in a variety of events throughout the novel. Yet, it remains a sad story. As I Lay Dying depicts incompetent people trying unsuccessfully to cope with a bleak present and future. After laughing at the absurdity of events along the journey, we must also contemplate much more profoundly the collective plight of the Bundrens in a seemingly meaningless environment. The bleak humour that exists in the narrative is merely on the surface of this work of literature that addresses the disturbing and despairing problem of human isolation.

It is completely out of perspective to consider this novel as predominantly humorous. Even the optimism in the novel, in terms of Addie's New Hope, does not include the rest of the family. To state that Anse is a "predominantly comic figure" is to focus too much on his absurd logic and actions and ignore the more serious consideration of him as a lifeless, non-supporting husband (Swiggart 111). Anse is a

pathetic individual who contributes most significantly to the demise of the Bundren family and is the cause of Addie's longing for New Hope in the afterlife. Consequently, while the reader may "sit back to laugh at the human capacity for the outrageous", let him/her not lose sight of the sadness that is the essence of futile, meaningless relationships (Skei 127). One must, as a responsible reader, be prepared to acknowledge that it is a tainted humour we are presented with.

C) Old Man

The tall convict does not discover the strength of the human spirit like the Joad family, nor does he anticipate the rewards of Addie Bundren's New Hope in the afterlife. Nonetheless, there is an optimistic social purpose in Faulkner's novella, Old Man. The tall convict, despite the trying natural elements and tormenting social force of the woman, does indeed rescue her and the baby from despair. Only on a subconscious level does the tall convict realize the power of communication within the group concept.

Although there is no denying the fact that the tall convict is depicted in an absurd context, the tone of the novel is optimistic. The tall convict is determined to survive the flooding waters, and very nobly, return the woman and child to safety. Despite the fact that the tall convict

is essentially powerless in dealing with the woman on any personal level, and he considers her not only a burden but a millstone of monstrous proportions, he does nevertheless see to it that she is returned to safety. In this sense, the tall convict's actions, apart from his true feeling for the woman, are in themselves "heroic" (Vickery 161). There is optimism not only in his endurance but in his commitment to fulfil the mission assigned by the prison guards. Thus, while the tall convict cannot redeem his sense of isolation on the boat he refuses to abandon the woman and escape to freedom. There is certainly a sense of dignity in his actions and preservation of "self-respect" (Swiggart 52). His actions are not out of love for the woman, recognition from society, or for the sake of a reward in terms of an early parole from jail. Instead, the tall convict is resolved to rescue the woman because it is the right thing to do. His sense of responsibility, commitment, "fortitude and capacity for suffering seem [to be] heroic attributes" and reasons for optimism (Skei 30). It is, then, only in the male group that the tall convict can derive strength. Although he observes desolate people fleeing for secure land and a refuge from flooding waters, the tall convict is "oblivious" to the power of the human group, represented by the "profound deep whisper" of the old man (Old Man 93). The whisper is symbolic of communication between people, both male and female, and the power and strength of the human group bonding together in common suffering. He

cannot recognize the whisper that comes from the other side of the bank. It is a deep, strong, and powerful sound that lingers in the tall convict's consciousness as he witnesses the despairing condition of the townspeople. It is interesting how the narrator captures the tall convict's experiences through sound. The "clashin" chains of the prison represent the meaning and life force that sustains him. The rain on the river bank falls fiercely but mysteriously "soundless" for the tall convict in comparison to the whisper of the river (Old Man 90). The profound whisper is disturbed only by the noise of a guitar (made by a young black man who is a contrast to the age and colour of the river) that represents the only soothing sound amidst the chaos the convict reflects upon. The tranquil notes of the guitar are the last sounds the tall convict notices before embarking on the boat, and they are never heard again. But it represents, though just slightly, the possibility of hope in an otherwise desperate environment. As the tall convict's situation upon the river worsens, the whisper of the old man transforms into a very distinctive sound that is heard when he is in his most vulnerable conditions. Feeling doomed with the burden of the woman, the sound forces the tall convict to "contemplate [it] with savage curiosity" (Old Man 128). Having struggled furiously for food and water, the tall convict acknowledges the sound which he vows to "never forget", since it represents the "deliberate and irresistible and monstrously disturbed

water" that victimizes him and the woman (Old Man 137).

However, the tall convict cannot assimilate this sound, this communication between people, into his experience since there is no conscious consolation in it. The only sound that is not clashing, screeching, or disturbing to the tall convict is the tranquillity of the guitar. Perhaps, then, his commitment to the woman is symbolic of a tranquil presence amidst an otherwise chaotic and determined environment. On a subconscious level the tall convict is prepared to recognize the strength of the human group. Just as the menacing sound of the river is beyond his experience, so too the strength of the human spirit is beyond conscious recognition. The tall convict knows where the sound comes from, but admits that he does not understand it. At the end of his experiences it remains "like a phantom behind the mist" (Old Man 137). Consequently, though there is some optimism in a subconscious recognition of the strength of human communication and mutual concern between peoples, the tall convict cannot transcend and penetrate the mystery of the apparition to consciously redeem himself of his alienating isolation and impotence with female sexuality. Communication itself breaks down for this individual who cannot surrender without being shot at, and is unjustly further sentenced upon his return to the Parchman Penitentiary. Ironically, it is with the Cajun hunter, whom he does not share a common language, that the convict communicates best.

There is an undeniable humour in the absurdity of the tall convict's heroic actions. But is it fair to conclude that the convict's story is fundamentally comic? Or is humour merely on the surface of a much more profound concern, as it is in As I Lay Dying? This is not to deny the optimistic tone of the novel, but it is to suggest that a reading of Old Man cannot be focused completely on humour. It is invalid to attribute solely humour to the tall convict's disparity between his "deep involvement in life and his desperate wish to remain uninvolved" (Swiggart 57). The powerlessness the tall convict is victimized by presents a rather disturbing scenario, quite similar to Addie Bundren's predicament. The tall convict cannot derive strength or consolation from women, and is incapable of dealing with his sexuality in the company of a woman. His revolting thoughts on the carcass-like burden of the female leaves no doubt that his torment is most sincere. His constant nosebleeds and distorted but simple logic provides a comic relief from the tension of his failure to establish any meaningful communication with the woman. While it can be stated that the tall convict's survival of the elements and his success of returning the burdensome woman to safety is comic in itself, the humour must be kept in perspective simply because at the end of the novella the convict is escaping not only the threatening sexual female, but "actually withdrawing from all human involvement" (Broughton 48). The ironic humour, thus, is secondary to the

tall convict's pathetic retreat to prison.

In conclusion, the Joad family is determined by natural and social forces, but manages to cope by remaining united with the hope of a prosperous future. Addie is also determined by these forces, but anticipates the New Hope in sharing a communion with the deceased in Jefferson. The tall convict's hope is in returning to the fraternity of the prison, but like Addie's condition, it is a disturbing optimism because it represents a degenerative retreat rather than a move towards self-improvement. Such a retreat in the personal development of both characters, as opposed to the progressive development of the individual as a part of "one big soul" in The Grapes of Wrath, cannot be discussed in a solely humorous way. Both Addie and the tall convict seek an escape from the human spirit that is the major sustaining force for the migrant workers. The humour in The Grapes of Wrath is a result of a joyful spirit which the Okies share to combat the determining forces and is a lighter humour than exists in the two Faulkner texts under examination. The humour that the dysfunctional Anse creates and the tall convict's actions produce is more controlled because of the plight of the isolated and alienated individuals involved. In As I Lay Dying and Old Man, there is a "grim humour of a lacerated and outraged sensibility" that is not evident in The Grapes of Wrath (Volpe 223).

Conclusion

The ability of the individual to be a part of a group results in the human spirit that sustains the Joad family in their confrontation with the determining naturalistic forces. Genuine love and concern for the other, although it does not completely triumph in the end, emerges significantly as a most valid response to the determining forces. For Addie Bundren and the tall convict, also victims of determining natural and social forces beyond control, their inability to share a sincere loving communication stifles their emotional, social, and psychological development. There are no significant "others" who can provide security, comfort, and love to Faulkner's protagonists, as there are for the members of the Joad family. In all three texts traditional notions of religion become meaningless, but in the person of Jim Casey, the Joad family discovers a significant consolation in the powerful human spirit, the "one big soul" everyone is a part of. Steinbeck brilliantly depicts determining forces and "the potential of freedom" through the emergence of the group that is able to provide a sense of fulfillment (Conder 160). Such a human spirit is trapped in the individualistic notions of Addie Bundren and the tall convict. As a result, although there is optimism in the novels being studied, the hope in the latter two works is nevertheless tainted. The optimism in The Grapes of Wrath reaffirms not only the strength of human

endurance, but also the potential of human sacrifice and charity. The New Hope of life after death for Addie does not concern her earthly family. The tall convict anticipates and longs for life back in the fraternity of the penitentiary, but it remains a mere escape from the threat of women. The ability to share one's ordeal with another person is not redeemed in the optimistic notions of neither Addie nor the tall convict.

In As I Lay Dying and Old Man there is no Jim Casy figure to serve as a model, not so much as a selfless human being, but as an individual who has discovered an inner peace and the feeling of oneness with another person. There is no room for individualism at the expense of another in Casy's philosophical teachings. Connie, Rose of Sharon's husband, cannot accept the notions of sacrifice and sharing for the sake of the group and thus deserts the Joad family. There is no stable or sustaining central role in the two Faulkner novels because no individual is willing to commit to another person to experience the sustaining benefits of a collective spirit. The dominant concern for the self in such a determined environment contributes to Addie's and the tall convict's alienation. Both Addie and the tall convict seem to exist in, what Darl describes upon looking at a bucket of still water, a "round orifice in nothingness" (Dying 9). Nothing is done to improve themselves as people amidst the naturalistic forces that render them powerless. Thus, life

itself becomes vulnerable to despair. The above two individuals seem to resign themselves to the determining natural and social forces. The dead air and dark land only contributes to the misery of being married to the luckless and inadequate Anse. To be laid with her deceased family in Jefferson is the easiest escape. Similarly, the tall convict does not bother attempting to establish communication with the woman, since it is easier to degrade her humanity and consider her womb a monster. For the tall convict, his eager return to the security of the jail, free from pregnant females, is in itself a pathetic action. Even though the individuals in all three novels are victims, Addie and the tall convict inevitably evoke less sympathy than the Joad family who attempt to improve their condition and resolve the disparity that effects all the migrant workers. The plight of the Joad family and their example of endurance and charity makes it clear that naturalism is not merely a philosophy of "pessimistic determinism" (Conder 1).

The three novels examined attest to the fact that naturalism deals with events that, according to Norris, "make and frequently break characters' lives" (Norris 244). John Steinbeck, in The Grapes of Wrath, assumes what Norris terms the "responsibility" of a novelist for using his fiction as a vehicle that goes beyond just entertainment. Steinbeck's examination of a people in distress is a scathing criticism of the exploitation of the Okies in the 1930's, and it is a

tribute to the strength of the human community that unites in body and spirit. It is, then, an example of the strength of the individual experiencing oneness with another. Faulkner's fiction is also not just for the sake of entertainment. In fact, its absurdity creates a humour that veils a profound disparity in Addie Bundren's and the tall convict's condition. The above characters are alienated and isolated. The individual alone is completely resigned to the forces that determine their lives.

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